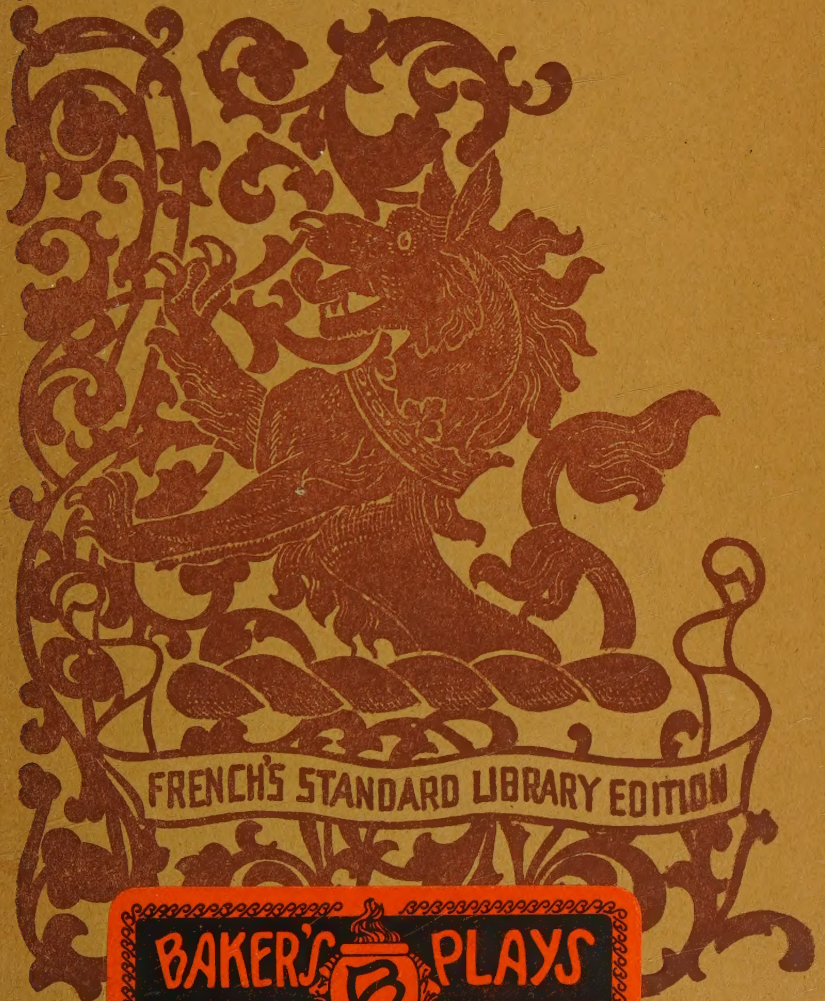
THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE

By C. STAFFORD DICKENS



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SAMUEL FRENCH, 25 West 45th Street, New York City
New and Explicit Descriptive Catalogue Mailed Free on Request

THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

C. STAFFORD DICKENS

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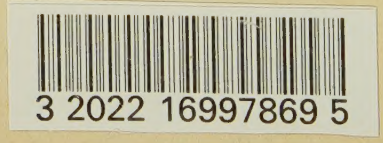

To the skeptical and those people who are prone to say "such things don't happen," the following historical facts may be of interest.

In 1768 a Russian carpenter named Stephen Mali went to Montenegro and, representing himself as a son of the then Russian Emperor, Peter III, won the confidence of the Montenegrins, married a native princess and was eventually made the King of Montenegro, which country he ruled with some success from 1768 until his death in 1773.

C. STAFFORD DICKENS.

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Dickens, Charles Stafford.
The command performance
1930.

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The following is a program of the first performance of "THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE" as presented at the Klaw Theatre, New York, N. Y., October 3, 1928:

HERMAN SHUMLIN

Presents

THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE

A Comedy in Three Acts

By C. STAFFORD DICKENS

Staged by Clifford Brooke

HILDRED SABIDOFF, *Heavy Man of the Baroc Repertoire Co.*
—William H. Barwald
PAUL MASOCH, *Director of the Baroc Repertoire Co.*
—Ivan F. Simpson
ANSCHE MILOSOVIC, *Stage Manager of the Company*
—Zvee Scooler
LYDIA PETROVIC, *Ingenue of the Company.....Rose Keane*
YANA LODOFFSKI, *a Member of the Company*
—Maria Ziccardi
PETER KRADITCH, *Leading Man of the Company....Ian Keith*
COUNT VELLENBURG, *Chancellor of Moldavia.....Lee Baker*
A SERGEANT OF POLICE.....*George Spelvin*
SERVANT ..... *George Haight*
ELINOR, *Queen of Moldavia.....Beatrice Terry*
ALEXIS, *Prince of Moldavia.....Mr. Keith*
ELIZABETH, *Queen of Wallachia.....Charlotte Granville*
NICHOLAS, *King of Wallachia.....Hubert Druce*
KATERINA, *Princess of Wallachia.....Jesse Royce Landis*
BLONDEL, *Secretary to the King.....Robert Clear*
HUGO, *Valet of the Prince.....Walter Soderling*
Actors, Gendarmes, Servants

ACT I. SCENE I. *Stage of the Municipal Theatre, Baroc, Moldavia.* SCENE II. *Room at the Royal Palace, Baroc. The next day.*

ACT II. SCENE I. *The Royal Palace, Diniker, Wallachia. Two weeks later.* SCENE II. *The Same. The morning after.*

ACT III. SCENE I. *At the Royal Palace, Baroc. One month later.* SCENE II. *Two Hours Later.*

CHARACTERS

QUEEN ELINOR OF MOLDAVIA
QUEEN ELIZABETH OF WALLACHIA
PRINCESS KATERINA OF WALLACHIA
LYDIA PETROVIC
PRINCE ALEXIS OF MOLDAVIA
PETER KRADITSCH
COUNT VELLENBURG, *Chancellor of Moldavia*
KING NICHOLAS OF WALLACHIA
HILDRED SABIDOFF
PAUL MASOCH
OLAF MILOSOVIC
MANSERVANT *(at Palace of Moldavia)*
MANSERVANT *(at Palace of Wallachia)*
SERGEANT
BLONDEL

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I:

SCENE I—*Back stage of the Municipal Theater at Baroc, the Capital City of Moldavia.*

SCENE II—*The Queen of Moldavia's Apartment in the Palace at Baroc. The next day.*

ACT II:

SCENE I—*Room in the Palace at Diniker, the Capital of Wallachia. Five weeks later.*

SCENE II—*Same as Scene I. The next morning.*

ACT III: Same as Act I, Scene II. Six weeks later.

TIME: *The Present Day.*

(This is not a costume play, and should be treated essentially in a modern fashion.)

THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE

ACT I

SCENE I: *The scene is the bare stage of the Municipal Theater at Baroc, the Capital City of Moldavia.*

TIME: *It is eleven o'clock in the forenoon.*

Various members of the local stock company are assembled for a rehearsal.

There is a little table down extreme R., *at which is seated, pouring over a manuscript, the* DIRECTOR (MASOCH) *and the* STAGE MANAGER (MILOSOVIC). *Standing* L. *is a group of three members of the company, talking quietly. On a table up stage* C. *a man is seated, reading a newspaper. Walking impatiently up and down the stage is a rather thick-set, middle-aged "actor"-looking man* (SABIDOFF). *All are rather shabbily but showily dressed. It is a cheap company.*

The stage is lighted by a "bunch" of lights on an iron stand at the side. Stacked around the walls are pieces of old and rather battered scenery. Steps from auditorium to stage. If steps are impractical, VELLENBURG *and* POLICE *can enter* R.

As the Curtain Rises, the HEAVY MAN (SABIDOFF) *walks to the table at which the* DIRECTOR *is sitting, and says in a loud voice so that he can be heard by the rest of the assembled company:*

SABIDOFF. I thought this rehearsal was called for eleven o'clock this morning?

(MASOCH, *the director, looks up from his manuscript.* MASOCH *in a tightly fitting rather threadbare frock coat which is buttoned with difficulty across his too protuberant stomach—striped trousers, old boots and spats—a long cane in his hand and an old-fashioned top hat. He is, although, well shaven, blue jowled and has long black hair.)*

MASOCH. That's right, Sabidoff, eleven o'clock.

SABIDOFF. It is now fifteen minutes past.

MASOCH. Well, we can't start until Kraditsch arrives. I can't think why he is so late.

SABIDOFF. I think it's damned impertinence keeping a whole company waiting like this. When I was a young actor——

MASOCH. *(Interrupting him)* Is everyone here except him?

SABIDOFF. *(Crosses to group* L.*)* Miss Petrovic isn't here yet, either.

MILOSOVIC. *(At table* R.*)* They're staying at the same hotel this week, aren't they?

MASOCH. Who?

MILOSOVIC. Kraditsch and Miss Petrovic.

MASOCH. I don't know, are they?

SABIDOFF. Obviously. What a man does outside the theater is entirely his own business, but I don't think he should be permitted to let his love affairs render him incapable of rising sufficiently early to attend an eleven o'clock rehearsal.

MASOCH. Well, we won't wait for them any longer. We'll start in on the first act, Milosovic. (MILOSOVIC *commences to arrange tables and chairs about the stage* R., C. *and* L. *Quietly)* Do you really think he's having an affair with her?

SABIDOFF. My dear laddie, he's the kind that would have an affair with anyone who would let him.

MASOCH. Really?

SABIDOFF. Absolutely. He was staying in the same lodgings with me the week before last in Amnakostia and the landlady's daughter told me he walked in at three o'clock in the morning to ask her the way to the stage door.

MASOCH. Well, I hope she told him!

MILOSOVIC. All ready, Mr. Masoch?

MASOCH. All right. We'll start in on Act I from your entrance, Sabidoff. Take your positions, please. *(The young men of the company are of the effeminate order.* BISHOFF, KUMJIAN *and* ZUNOVICH *group themselves around table* L. *They all look very strained and uncomfortable.)* All right, Sabidoff—your entrance. I'm playing Tristram. *(Reading from the script he has in his hand)* "Come in, Messaire."

(SABIDOFF, *who is playing Louis XI, enters* C. *He is of the old-time actor type who rants and speaks in a very heavy voice.)*

SABIDOFF. "Is this the eyrie?"

MASOCH. "This is the Fir Cone Tavern." *(He turns to the people in their positions at the back of the stage)* That's your cue to laugh, everybody. Do pay attention, please. "This is the Fir Cone Tavern."

(There is a peal of forced, thin laughter from the people at the back.)

SABIDOFF. *(Laughing very dramatically)* "Ha! Ha! Ha! This is seeing life, friend Tristram."

MASOCH. "Let's hope it won't be seeing death, your Majesty. There are a couple of rogues up there—*(Indicating* BORIS *and* OTTO*)*—who would spit you or slit you for the price of a drink."

SABIDOFF. "Hush, man! No Majesty here. 'Tis of an Eastern king I shall be surnamed Haroom—" *(He turns to* MASOCH *and in his natural voice says)* That's an awkward word, laddie. How would you pronounce it? Hairom—or Hairum—or——

MASOCH. Hairoom's all right, I think, old man.

SABIDOFF. I don't suppose it matters a damn, anyway. *(In his actor's voice again)* "It was his pleasure to go about Bagdad o' nights, disguised, and thus learn much to the welfare of his realm. I am following his example and I expect to learn much."

MASOCH. *(Reading)* "Be careful, Sire——"

SABIDOFF. "You were always a bird of ill omen. Be bright, man—— Look at me—my throne sways like a rocking chair, yet I don't pull a sad face. The stars promise success and I dreamed a dream last night that filled my heart with gladness."

MASOCH. "Dreams and stars—stars and dreams—"

SABIDOFF. "I dreamed that I was a swine——" *(In his natural voice)* I say, laddie. Don't you think we might cut that bit?

MASOCH. What bit?

SABIDOFF. That bit about the swine——

MASOCH. Of course not. That's the whole keynote to your character.

SABIDOFF. Oh, very well—only I thought it was a little bit vulgar. However—"I dreamed that I was a swine rooting in the streets of Paris and I found a pearl of great price in the gutter. I took it and placed it in my crown, where it shone so brightly that it filled all Paris with its light. I awoke trem-

bling—— *(There is another stilted laugh from the back.)* Who are these people?"

MASOCH. "Some of the worst cats and rats in all Paris. I miss one rogue from the gallery, though—one Villon—who is their leader."

SABIDOFF. "Ah! Here comes Francois!"

MASOCH. That's Kraditsch's entrance and we can't get any further until he arrives.

(Enter LYDIA PETROVIC R., *the ingenue of the company. She is breathless and dishevelled. She goes to* MASOCH.*)*

LYDIA. I'm awfully sorry I'm so late, Mr. Masoch, but——

MASOCH. I hope you know you've been keeping the company waiting for over twenty minutes.

LYDIA. But it wasn't really my fault.

MASOCH. Can you give us any idea what time your fault will arrive——

LYDIA. You mean Peter? It *is* my fault that *he's* late.

MASOCH. Naturally.

LYDIA. No, it isn't naturally. I was walking down to the theater all by myself when I was accosted by three men. I tried to take no notice and walk on, but they grabbed hold of my arm. They started to drag me into their car, when somebody dashed up to my rescue—— It was Peter!

MASOCH. Why the devil couldn't he mind his own business?

LYDIA. What do you mean?

MASOCH. If the young men of the town chose to pay you a little attention, he's no right to interfere.

LYDIA. You mean he should have walked by and allowed me to be kidnapped by those devils without raising a hand to save me?

MASOCH. Certainly—boys will be boys—especial-

ly when there's a theatrical company in the town. I don't suppose they'd have hurt you—much—besides, an actor's not supposed to have any absurd feelings of chivalry like that—it's bad for business.

SABIDOFF. Exactly. Look at the enormous business we did three weeks up in Runebad when old Count Von Hellstein took a fancy to Yana.

LYDIA. Oh, you all make me sick—and I'll tell you this, Mr. Masoch, if you think I'm going to be at the beck and call of every lecherous little local hanger-on for the sake of bringing a few more crowns into your box office, you've made a big mistake. When I go wrong it's going to be nobody's benefit but my own.

SABIDOFF. The selfishness of the modern actress is appalling. When I was playing the king in Hamlet—the little lady who was my Ophelia——

(Door slam and PETER'S *voice is heard off* R.*)*

MASOCH. Come on—come on! Let's get on with the rehearsal. We've wasted too much time as it is. We'll take your scene with Lydia in the first act. Places, please!

(Enter PETER R. *His coat is torn, there is a cut on his cheek and a bruise over his left eye. He has obviously been in a good fight.)*

PETER. Hello, everybody! Sorry I'm so late. *(He goes to* LYDIA*)* So you got here all right? I suppose Lydia's told you all about it, Masoch. Wasn't it lucky I happened to come along just at the critical moment?

MASOCH. You were supposed to be here at eleven o'clock. Instead of which, you get yourself mixed up in a public brawl and keep the whole company waiting.

PETER. Don't be a silly old fool, Masoch. They were trying to kidnap Lydia.

MASOCH. Nonsense—because two or three high-spirited lads——

PETER. High-spirited, my eye! They were out for business, and if I hadn't come along they'd have had Lydia as sure as death! What a fight it was! I was wonderful, wasn't I, Lydia? Three to one against me—but what did I care? Crash went my fist into the first fat face I saw, and down he went. Bam went my foot into the belly of the next, and down *he* went. The other one dropped Lydia, and away she ran, when another young pup dashes up. "What the devil are you interfering for?" says he. "It's your turn next!" I cry, as I throw the third man over my shoulder and crash my fist into the newcomer's teeth and nearly knock his head off——

MASOCH. *(Groans)* Good God——

PETER. By this time I saw a couple of policemen running toward us, and I thought, "Peter, my lad, this is where you use your discretion and run." And giving one of the curs a farewell kick in the ear for luck, I took to my heels and ran. After me they came, full cry, but needless to say, I soon outdistanced them—and here I am at your service. *(He bows.)*

MASOCH. But—good God, man, do you realize what you've done? Committed assault and battery and possibly murder!

PETER. *(Cheerfully)* I hope—murder!

SABIDOFF. You know what it would have meant if the police had caught you? Hard labor in the salt mines.

MASOCH. And our business ruined for the week.

LYDIA. Did anyone see you come in the stage door?

PETER. I don't know. I didn't look round to see.

The men that were chasing me didn't—I lost them a mile away——

SABIDOFF. You've made a hell of a mess of the morning, I must say! If it wasn't for the fact that you haven't an understudy, I'd give you up to the police myself to teach you a lesson to mind your own damn business in future.

PETER. *(Advancing to* SABIDOFF *menacingly)* You fat-gutted old pig! I'll knock your diseased old carcass into little bits——

MASOCH. Gentlemen! !

PETER. *(Turning on* MASOCH*)* You're as bad as he is. You'd sell your own sister for the price of a couple of seats in the balcony. You're not men at all. That's why you are annoyed because I happened to save Lydia from being kidnapped by a lot of young blackguards.

MASOCH. *(Endeavoring to be dignified)* Have you quite finished?

PETER. Not nearly, but I can't think of anything filthy enough to call you——

MASOCH. Then perhaps you wouldn't mind getting on with the rehearsal. We'll go into this other lamentable matter later.

LYDIA. I'm too shaken to rehearse at all—I'm going home.

MASOCH. Good God! woman, don't you realize that the play's going on the night after tomorrow? We've scarcely touched any of your scenes yet.

PETER. Just run through your big scene in the third act with me, Lydia, and then go back.

MASOCH. Who in hell's running this rehearsal?

LYDIA. It's no use, Mr. Masoch. I don't feel up to it. I'll run through my scene with Peter if you like——

MASOCH. Oh, all right. It'll mean rehearsing all tomorrow night, that's all. Set the third act, Milosovic. (MILOSOVIC *again rearranges the chairs.)*

LYDIA. Where would you like to start from, Peter?

PETER. My entrance. Is that all right with you, Masoch?

MASOCH. I suppose it's got to be. Clear, please—

MILOSOVIC. Clear, please! *(The other members of the cast go off* R., L. *and* C.*)*

MASOCH. All right. You enter from down the steps, Peter. Lydia, you're standing by the fountain, gazing at the stars.

*(*PETER *makes his entrance* C. *and the rehearsal commences.)*

LYDIA. "My Lord."

PETER. "My Lady. Will you watch the players?"

LYDIA. "No, I am more in a mood for moonlight than candlelight."

PETER. "May I ask you a question?"

LYDIA. "Surely."

PETER. "Are you content with me?"

LYDIA. "You have done much."

PETER. "I have much more to do. For seven days I have wrestled with greatness as Jacob wrestled with the angel—I have made the King popular, the Parisians loyal, and the army faithful."

LYDIA. "Then why do you linger here where courtiers feast and ladies dance?"

PETER. "I want the Duke to believe that I am a fool. But tonight I ride!"

LYDIA. "I would that I were a man that I might ride with you."

PETER. "I ride in your honor."

LYDIA. "You may die if you ride on the King's business—but so may I who sit at home and eat my heart."

PETER. "For whom?"

LYDIA. "I will tell you that tomorrow."

PETER. "Let tomorrow tell tomorrow's story. Tonight we are immortal, wandering forever in the garden, breathing this soft-scented air."

LYDIA. "You may say what you please—tomorrow."

PETER. "Alas, no. Tomorrow I shall be mortally sober—tonight I am divinely drunk. Tonight if I dared I would ease my heart."

LYDIA. "You may say what you please—tonight!"

PETER. "If I were to die tomorrow, I would tell you this tonight—I love you. These are easy words to say, yet my heart fails as I say them. Men are such fools that they have but one name for a thousand meanings and beggar the poor word love to base kitchen usages and work-a-day desires. But I would keep it holy for the flame which it sometimes pleases heaven to light up one heart for the worship of another. I never knew what love was until I saw a girl's face on a May morning. The God in me leaped into being—to greet the God in your eyes. I love you." Excuse me, dear—— *(He shouts out to somebody out in the auditorium)* I say, what are you doing there? Don't you know this is a private rehearsal?

MASOCH. Oh, my God, what's the matter now?

PETER. There's a man out in front there listening to the rehearsal.

MASOCH. Where? *(He peers out into the auditorium)* I'm sorry, sir, but I'm afraid you can't stay there.

PETER. If you want to see the performance, come in on Monday night and pay.

MASOCH. *(Quietly to* PETER*)* Be careful, laddie. He may be a critic.

VELLENBURG. *(The Chancellor of Moldavia, immaculate, easy, urbane; in other words, one's conception of the perfect diplomat. In audience)* I must apologize for this intrusion, ladies and gentlemen,

"THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE

Act I, See Page 11

but I happened to be passing the front of the theater, and hearing the voices I walked in—and I have been sitting for the last five minutes, enchanted by the delightful acting of this lady and gentleman. Please forgive me if I have unwittingly trespassed——

MASOCH. My dear sir, I'm delighted to hear that you have so enjoyed the poor efforts of my confreres—but no strangers are allowed to witness a rehearsal. You can, however, as my young friend suggests, see the whole performance on Monday night if you care to pay the paltry price charged for admission.

VELLENBURG. That I most certainly intend to do. (MASOCH *sighs loudly with relief.)* I shall look forward to it with the greatest of pleasure. What is the name of the play you are doing? *(Comes down aisle; goes up steps to stage.)*

MASOCH. "The Royal Masquerade." This young lady here plays the Princess. May I present Lydia Petrovic and our young friend here, Peter Kraditsch, who plays the part of a tavern loafer masquerading as a king.

VELLENBURG. It sounds a most interesting story.

SABIDOFF. *(Pushing his way to the front)* It *is,* sir. In the first act I have a wonderful scene with the leading lady here in which I——

VELLENBURG. *(In rather a bored voice)* No, don't tell me, then I shall be the more surprised on Monday night. In the meantime I'll take my leave of you——

MASOCH. Perhaps you'd like me to reserve the seats for you—a mere ten crowns?

VELLENBURG. Thank you, no. I won't trouble you. I'll send for them this afternoon.

MASOCH. May I ask whom we have had the honor of entertaining so briefly?

VELLENBURG. Just a public servant like your-

selves, gentlemen—whose name would probably convey nothing to you.

(Enter TWO POLICEMEN *and a* SERGEANT *down aisle. They march onto the stage.)*

THE SERGEANT. Halt! *(The men stop.)*

MASOCH. What the devil do you mean by marching your men into a private rehearsal?

THE SERGEANT. I have a warrant to apprehend, dead or alive, the body of a man seen entering the stage door about ten minutes ago——

MASOCH. Good God, what for?

THE SERGEANT. For battery and assault on the august person of his Royal Highness, Prince Alexis of Moldavia.

PETER. The Prince!

MASOCH. *(Helplessly)* The Prince—— Oh, my God!

VELLENBURG. This is a very serious charge, Sergeant.

THE SERGEANT. *(Seeing* VELLENBURG *for the first time, salutes)* Your Excellency!

VELLENBURG. It cannot possibly apply to any of these gentlemen.

THE SERGEANT. Begging your Excellency's pardon—the accused was positively seen coming in that stage door ten minutes ago——

VELLENBURG. Surely none of *you* gentlemen have been so indiscreet as to assault our Prince——

PETER. Indiscreet be damned! I'd do it again under similar circumstances, Prince or no Prince—

VELLENBURG. You!

PETER. Yes, why not! And what the devil has it got to do with you, anyway? Who are you?

THE SERGEANT. Arrest that man! *(The* TWO POLICEMEN *get into position on each side of* PETER.)

VELLENBURG. One moment, Sergeant. He's a nice

lad—— It's a pity—— *(To* PETER*)* If I can do anything to help you——

PETER. Oh, go to the devil!

VELLENBURG. *(Smiling blandly)* All right, Sergeant. Take him away.

THE SERGEANT. Party—'shun! *(The* Two POLICEMEN *come to attention.)*

PETER. I say, Sergeant—who's your talkative old friend, anyway?

THE SERGEANT. Quiet, fool!

VELLENBURG. Tell him, Sergeant. Tell him.

THE SERGEANT. His Excellency, Count Vellenburg, the Chancellor of Moldavia. Party! Right turn! Quick march!

(The SOLDIERS *turn; march quickly off* R. *with* PETER *between them. As the curtain falls,* PETER *is struggling with the* POLICEMEN.*)*

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE II: *The* QUEEN OF MOLDAVIA'S *apartment in the Palace of Baroc.*

DISCOVERED: *As the curtain rises a* MANSERVANT *ushers in* LYDIA PETROVIC *and* PAUL MASOCH C. *They are dressed as befitting poor provincial actors;* LYDIA *in old but rather flambuoyant clothes.*

MANSERVANT. You will wait here and Her Majesty will see you in a few moments.

MASOCH. Many thanks to you. (MANSERVANT *exits* C. MASOCH *and* LYDIA *sit down gingerly on the extreme edge of* R. *settee.* MASOCH, *after an uncomfortable pause)* Well—we're in!

LYDIA. Yes, thank heavens—I didn't think she'd even consent to see us.

MASOCH. Oh, I did—I was confident that she would. Our profession commands an entree where a mere civilian would get the bird.

LYDIA. That stuff's all right for press reporters, but it doesn't apply to queens.

MASOCH. Why not? After all, scratch off the skin of a queen, you'll find the woman—as the poet says.

LYDIA. I wonder what they've done with poor Peter?

MASOCH. Serves him right, whatever it is—interfering young fool. If it wasn't for the fact that I can't ring up on Monday night if I don't get him out—I'd let him rot——

LYDIA. How noble of you!

MASOCH. Well, I've got to think of the show before anything——

LYDIA. Even before your honor.

MASOCH. Honor is a quality which an actor can only assume when it doesn't interfere with his art.

LYDIA. Then God preserve me from actors!

MASOCH. Oh, they're not so bad when business permits them to be human—— (LYDIA *does not reply to this. There is a pause. Looking around)* This would make rather a tasty interior for the second act of "The Scarlet Princess"—quite nice. I should set that bookcase a little further down left—that door would have to be about three feet further up stage—and the draperies——

LYDIA. Oh, for God's sake, shut up! You'd stage-manage your own mother's funeral.

MASOCH. Talking of stage-managing,—when the Queen enters, if ever, you should adopt the attitude of the tired and tearful heroine—you haven't slept for thinking of your tortured lover in the dungeon—

LYDIA. I shall do nothing of the kind. He's not my lover and he's not being tortured. I shall tell her Majesty that it was an outrage that he was ever arrested—I shall——

MASOCH. If that's your conception of the part, you'd better have stayed at home. You'd better leave the whole thing to me—just sit and weep quietly and humbly.

LYDIA. If you think——

MASOCH. Look out——

(The C. *door opens and the* MANSERVANT *ushers in the* QUEEN OF MOLDAVIA. *She is a tall, forbidding-looking woman, dressed entirely in black.* LYDIA *and* MASOCH *rise.)*

MANSERVANT. Your Majesty, these are the two

theatricals. *(He says "theatricals" with the same expression as he would say garbage men.)*

(MASOCH *bows deliberately.* LYDIA *curtseys.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. All right, Flauberg. You may go. *(Exit* MANSERVANT. *The* QUEEN *sits at table* L.*)* You may sit. (LYDIA *and* MASOCH *sit.)* Now tell me, what did you want to see me about?

(They both speak at the same time.)

LYDIA. I want you to give Peter his freedom. It wasn't his fault. He only rescued me from being assaulted by a set of ruffians——

MASOCH. Your Highness, I humbly crave to bring before your notice and to plead for your clemency in the case of a poor, unfortunate actor, who——

(Together)

QUEEN ELINOR. How can I understand if you both talk? *(To* LYDIA*)* Now, child, what is it?

MASOCH. *(Quickly)* Your Majesty——

QUEEN ELINOR. Quiet! When I wish you to speak I'll tell you. Come, girl—what have you to say?

LYDIA. We've come to see you about Peter, your Majesty, the man your guard arrested yesterday.

MASOCH. *(Rising)* A promising young actor of my company who—— *(The* QUEEN *looks at him; he subsides into the settee.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. *(To* LYDIA*)* Who is this Peter, and why has he been arrested?

LYDIA. *(Rising; coming to* QUEEN*)* Peter Kraditsch is his name. Some ruffians tried to kidnap me. Peter came along and enabled me to escape.

There was a fight. They were four to one against him. He knocked three of them down, then the guard came along. He ran away—but they traced him to the theater and arrested him.

QUEEN ELINOR. Why come to me? Do you think that I can interfere in the settling of a street brawl?

LYDIA. It wasn't merely a brawl. They were trying to kidnap me—and I came to you, your Majesty, because the ringleader was your son.

QUEEN ELINOR. The Prince! !

MASOCH. Just the light-hearted prank of a high-spirited boy, your Majesty.

QUEEN ELINOR. Another word from you and you will be taken out, and——

MASOCH. *(Hurriedly)* The rest is silence, your Majesty.

QUEEN ELINOR. How do you know that my son was one of these men?

LYDIA. They told us when they arrested Peter. Oh, your Majesty, I beg of you not to let them send him to the salt mines. He hasn't done anything wrong. It was my fault——

(The QUEEN *rises; walks toward* L. *window, thinking.)*

MASOCH. *(In a loud whisper)* Tell her we sha'n't be able to open on Monday night——

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Rings bell; comes* C.*)* I will have the matter thoroughly investigated and justice shall be done.

LYDIA. *(Seizes the* QUEEN'S *hand and kisses it)* Oh! Your Majesty!

(MANSERVANT *enters. The* QUEEN *nods to him that the interview is over. He goes to* C. *door; opens it.* LYDIA *exits first.* MASOCH *goes to the door. and as he reaches it, turns.)*

MASOCH. *(Speaking quickly)* If you could manage to liberate the lad by Monday—so that he can play—— (MANSERVANT *cuts off the rest of* MASOCH'S *speech by pushing him off and shutting the door.)*

(The QUEEN *goes to the telephone on table down* R.*)*

QUEEN ELINOR. Put me through to the Prince's apartment.

MANSERVANT. His Excellency, Count Vellenburg, wishes to see your Highness.

QUEEN ELINOR. Show his Excellency in. *(Turning to telephone)* I wish to speak to the Prince.—Oh!—Go in and awaken him, and tell him that I wish to see him in my apartment with the least possible delay. *(She puts the receiver down.* MANSERVANT *ushers in* VELLENBURG.*)*

VELLENBURG. *(Enters* C. MANSERVANT *exits)* Good morning, your Majesty. I hope you slept well.

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Shortly)* Oh, fairly—fairly.

VELLENBURG. And that you are in perfect health this morning.

QUEEN ELINOR. My health's all right, but I'm in a damn bad temper.

VELLENBURG. *(Smiling)* Your Majesty!

QUEEN ELINOR. Well, you are the only one who is sufficiently discreet for me to swear at since the Prince Consort died, so why shouldn't I?

VELLENBURG. I appreciate the honor—but may I ask what has disturbed your natural serenity?

QUEEN ELINOR. I have no natural serenity and you know it. How could I have with a boy like Alexis to cope with?

VELLENBURG. Ah!—What's he done this time?

QUEEN ELINOR. Tried to kidnap some wretched little travelling actress, according to the story she's just told me——

VELLENBURG. She's been to see you?

QUEEN ELINOR. She and some terrible-looking old mountebank—begging me to save her rescuer. They found out that it was Alexis.

VELLENBURG. Obviously a case of mistaken identity.

QUEEN ELINOR. That's all very well—but we sha'n't be able to get away with that every time.

VELLENBURG. Alexis will have to be spoken to, to be warned to use a little more discretion.

QUEEN ELINOR. I've just sent for him. Apparently he didn't get in until ten o'clock this morning. He was still in bed when I rang up. When he *does* come down, I want you to say a few words to him. He doesn't take the slightest notice of me nowadays. *(Crosses; sits at table* L.*)*

VELLENBURG. With pleasure——

QUEEN ELINOR. You're so terribly cheerful this morning that I'm sure you've got something unpleasant on your mind. What is it?

VELLENBURG. Not exactly unpleasant, but rather pressing—— *(Sits on settee* R.*)*

QUEEN ELINOR. Oh, Lord! I knew it. What is it?

VELLENBURG. Our alliance with Wallachia is in danger of falling through——

QUEEN ELINOR. But I thought it was practically settled at the last tribunal——

VELLENBURG. It was—practically—and it would have been, actually, had not our friend, the King of Wallachia, found out how important for us the alliance is.

QUEEN ELINOR. Why should its importance to us make any difference to him?

VELLENBURG. He has discovered that Serbia is clamoring to get at our throats, and that, while they would declare war against us immediately under ordinary circumstances, they will *not* do so while there

is a chance of a powerful country like Wallachia becoming our allies. Knowing this, the King of Wallachia is holding up his signature. His present attitude being, "Why should we be the only beneficiaries of the alliance?"

QUEEN ELINOR. Well, what does he want that we can give him?

VELLENBURG. The King of Wallachia has tried many times to bring about an engagement for his daughter Katerina with young men of royal blood, but in every instance he has failed. Since realizing the importance of the projected alliance to us, he has cast covetous eyes on Alexis.

QUEEN ELINOR. He wants Alexis to marry his daughter?

VELLENBURG. That is his great idea. He has intimated that, simultaneously with the betrothal of his daughter to Alexis will come the announcement of a formal alliance between Moldavia and Wallachia.

QUEEN ELINOR. In other words, if Alexis does not consent to marry Katerina—the alliance is off—

VELLENBURG. It's hardly as simple as that.

QUEEN ELINOR. What do you mean?

VELLENBURG. Unfortunately, it is the consent of Katerina which has to be obtained. I think I told you that the Princess is a very modern young woman. She is determined that the man she eventually marries shall be eminently satisfying from every point of view. That is why they are invited to Wallachia on approval. If they meet with all the outward requirements, they are invited to pass a final, a more intimate test. Up to the present no applicant has been successful in doing so; but judging by your son's reputation, he should stand a fair chance of succeeding.

QUEEN ELINOR. If he returns, having failed—what then?

VELLENBURG. If he returns—then our problem regarding Serbia still remains unsolved.

QUEEN ELINOR. If he returns! What do you mean? Then—these horrible rumors are true—?

VELLENBURG. Rumors, your Majesty? What rumors?

QUEEN ELINOR. These stories one hears of her previous suitors. Von Liederburg was murdered. The day after the announcement that the betrothal would not take place, he was found floating on the lake with his heart pierced by a rapier.

VELLENBURG. Simply because he picked a quarrel with the most famous swordsman in Wallachia. Who was to blame but himself?

QUEEN ELINOR. And what of Rustoc, who three months before was hurled to his death from the castle tower?

VELLENBURG. It was well known that Rustoc couldn't stand altitude and suffered from vertigo.

QUEEN ELINOR. And before him Semonich, who was thrown from a horse and killed the day before he was to have returned home.

VELLENBURG. A notoriously bad horseman; chose the most vicious horse in the Royal stables to go riding on. Accidents—unfortunate accidents——

QUEEN ELINOR. Accidents! Artistic murder arranged by the King of Wallachia.

VELLENBURG. I choose to believe these were accidents.

QUEEN ELINOR. And do you suggest that I should send my only son—to run the risk of some similar—accident?

VELLENBURG. Yes. Why not?

QUEEN ELINOR. You're not human!

VELLENBURG. Before I am human, I am a patriot. If the alliance is not shortly an accomplished fact, we shall be in the throes of war with Serbia—a war which can have but one result—the obliteration of

Moldavia. You are a Queen. You have not one son. You have tens of thousands. Would you sacrifice them all to save one from taking a risk? You cannot —you must not refuse to send him. *(Pause.* QUEEN *looks at him.)* After all, he might please Katerina. It's never been done, but he might. If he does—the beautiful Katerina will be his and Moldavia will be saved.

QUEEN ELINOR. You say the King will sign this treaty immediately on the announcement of the betrothal?

VELLENBURG. Yes—with the saving clause that should the marriage not eventuate, the treaty will become null and void.

QUEEN ELINOR. But, Vellenburg—— (VELLENBURG *sees* ALEXIS *entering* C. *and stops her.)*

ALEXIS. *(Enters. There are obvious signs of his having been in a fight, inasmuch as his left eye is bandaged up. He is wearing a silk dressing-gown)* Good morning, Mother. Good morning, Count. Sorry I couldn't get to the phone when you called me—but I was in bed—I had rather a bad night.

QUEEN ELINOR. Good heavens, boy, what have you done to your face?

ALEXIS. I was walking in my sleep, and I collided with the bathroom door——

VELLENBURG. How unfortunate. Did it wake you up?

ALEXIS. Yes, it did. I couldn't sleep again for the rest of the night.

VELLENBURG. My poor lad! You look exactly as if you had been in a fight and had the worst of the argument.

ALEXIS. You doubt my word, sir?

VELLENBURG. Have I suggested that I do? But you'll admit that it's a coincidence that you should appear all battered up this morning and your mother

should have been told a few moments ago that you were concerned in a street fight yesterday——

ALEXIS. *(To the* QUEEN*)* You have been told?

QUEEN ELINOR. You needn't bother to lie any further. I know. At least I gave you credit for better sportsmanship than to be one of four against one man——

ALEXIS. *(Brings down chair; sits* C.*)* That's not true—I merely came to the rescue of three friends of mine who were attacked and downed without provocation by an enormous, powerful ruffian. I succeeded in driving him off, but not before he had inflicted this perfectly good eye on me——

QUEEN ELINOR. The girl concerned gave me quite a different version.

ALEXIS. The girl! !

VELLENBURG. Yes, I suppose in the excitement you forgot to mention her. Let me give you a word of advice. As the future King of Moldavia, you are not in the position to indulge in the casual indiscretions of an ordinary man. Enjoy all the amorous adventures that you appear so to revel in—but enjoy them privately—don't go looking for them in the highways and byways. It's undignified and sometimes dangerous. Don't you agree?

ALEXIS. No, I don't! Why should I, because I happen to be born a Prince, give up the pleasures of an ordinary man? If I see a woman I want, why shouldn't I try to get her? You dragged me back from Paris, where I was happy. What am I now? A marionette who can't move unless somebody pulls the strings. I want to live as I like, to have what I desire when I desire it.

QUEEN ELINOR. Have you no sense of duty?

ALEXIS. Yes—my duty to myself.

VELLENBURG. What of your duty to your country?

ALEXIS. I object to being badgered and hectored

—and to having my every movement watched and criticized. I'll do my duty to my country, I suppose —when the time comes——

QUEEN ELINOR. The time has already come when you can do your country a great—a tremendous service.

ALEXIS. *(Apprehensively)* How?

VELLENBURG. And at the same time perhaps enjoy a romantic adventure yourself.

ALEXIS. Perhaps you will explain. I'm no good at guessing these diplomatic riddles.

QUEEN ELINOR. You've heard of the Princess Katerina of Wallachia.

ALEXIS. Katerina!

VELLENBURG. The beautiful, alluring Katerina. Sought after by every young man of royal blood in Europe.

ALEXIS. Yes, I've heard of her. Why?

QUEEN ELINOR. It has been suggested by her father, the King, that you journey to Wallachia—meet the Princess, with the view to marrying her—

ALEXIS. *(Rising and shouting)* No! No! I won't do it. I refuse! Nothing on God's earth would induce me to go to Wallachia. Do you think I don't know about that woman, Katerina? What has happened to every other man who has aspired to her? You know—you both know as well as I do. None of them ever left Wallachia alive. Either she or the foul old King saw to that. And knowing that, you propose sending me—sacrificing me on the altar of your bloody politics! I tell you, Moldavia can go to hell before I'll do it!

QUEEN ELINOR. Alexis!

VELLENBURG. Even a Prince can be indicted for high treason!

ALEXIS. You can threaten all you want to. You can charge me with treason and send me to your salt

mines, but I'll be damned if you can induce me to go to Wallachia on that errand!

QUEEN ELINOR. Is that all you have to say?

ALEXIS. That's all, and I hope I have made myself clear.

VELLENBURG. You have, perfectly. We will decide how you are to be dealt with later. In the meantime I am sure it is her Majesty's wish that you do not leave the Palace until some decision is reached concerning you. (VELLENBURG *and* ALEXIS *look at the* QUEEN *for her answer.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. I shall be glad if you will give orders to that effect, Count.

ALEXIS. You mean that I'm a prisoner?

VELLENBURG. Not necessarily. If, after a little quiet consideration, you should change your mind—

ALEXIS. Vellenburg, if you think you can make me undertake that proposition, you're crazy. Whatever you threaten to do—whatever you do—won't make the slightest difference—I will not go to Wallachia, so do your damndest! *(Exit* ALEXIS C.*)*

VELLENBURG. That, your Majesty, was a very fine example of a worm in the act of turning.

QUEEN ELINOR. Alexis is my son.

VELLENBURG. An accident for which you should not be blamed, your Majesty!

QUEEN ELINOR. Instead of this vitriolic comment, a little constructive thought would be more to the point, Count. What are we going to do now?

VELLENBURG. Make what poor preparations we can for war with Serbia.

QUEEN ELINOR. Is there no other way out?

VELLENBURG. How can there be? It all hangs on this betrothal. You have only one son to offer up for the approval of the fair Katerina and he declines the honor.

QUEEN ELINOR. Then we have done all we can do.

VELLENBURG. *(He pauses; rises; then half to himself)* I wonder if we have—— "I dreamed I was a swine rooting in the streets of Paris and I discovered a pearl of great price——"

QUEEN ELINOR. Good heavens, Vellenburg, what *are* you rambling about?

VELLENBURG. Pardon, your Majesty, I was quoting a scrap of a play I saw some actors rehearsing yesterday——

QUEEN ELINOR. I should think this is too serious a moment to let your mind wander to plays and actors.

VELLENBURG. The moment is more than serious. Your Majesty, it is desperate. So desperate, in fact, that I am going to suggest to you such an impossible sounding solution that you will probably think I'm mad. Perhaps it was not for nothing that Providence permitted your son to be beaten yesterday.

QUEEN ELINOR. If you go on like this, I shall be certain that you *are* mad. What are you talking about?

VELLENBURG. I happen to know the young man who thrashed your son yesterday—and gave orders to the Warden of the prison to have him brought up here to see you, thinking perhaps you would be interested. But now the occasion will have far more significance.

QUEEN ELINOR. Why should I be interested? This is not the moment for me to see casual prisoners.

VELLENBURG. I think, your Majesty, that this is the vital moment for you to see this prisoner.

QUEEN ELINOR. Why should I?

VELLENBURG. I saw him acting the part of a tavern loafer who masquerades as a king, and so well did he play that I was enchanted——

QUEEN ELINOR. What wild ideas are you getting now?

VELLENBURG. One moment, your Majesty. This young actor bears an extraordinary likeness to your son——

(MAN SERVANT *enters* C.)

QUEEN ELINOR. You're not going to be mad enough to suggest—— *(Sees* MANSERVANT *and stops speaking.)*

MANSERVANT. The prisoner Kraditsch is here, your Excellency, by the Warden's orders.

VELLENBURG. Bring him in. (MANSERVANT *exits* C.) Your Majesty, it is imperative that you agree to whatever I propose. There is no other solution.

(MANSERVANT *enters* C., *followed by* PETER KRADITSCH *with a guard of two men. The* GUARDS *remain outside the room.* KRADITSCH *is unshaven, hair ruffled and unkempt from his night's incarceration.* MANSERVANT *exits. The* QUEEN *stifles an exclamation of surprise as she sees in* PETER *the extraordinary likeness of her son* ALEXIS.)

VELLENBURG. Well, my young rescuer of distressed damsels, I hope your night in the cells hasn't entirely dampened your ardor.

PETER. No, by God, it hasn't, and if you think—

VELLENBURG. One moment, my friend—— *(He turns to the* QUEEN*)* Your Majesty will, I know, pardon this young man's apparent lack of respect—but I am sure he doesn't recognize you.

PETER. *(Coming stiffly to attention)* Your Majesty!

VELLENBURG. Your Queen has honored you by granting you an audience.

PETER. I am deeply grateful and I appreciate the honor, your Majesty. I shall now be able to justify

myself—— *(He gets excited)* Why should they lock me up in a filthy cell all night just because——

QUEEN ELINOR. I have been told all the details of your case.

PETER. Ah! Then you'll understand how I feel about it, and after you've ordered them to release me, I should like a few words with that Chief Warden of yours. Of all the——

VELLENBURG. I'm afraid you're a little too optimistic. There will be no order for your release.

PETER. But, your Majesty——

QUEEN. You have committed a most serious unprovoked and murderous assault on the Prince of Moldavia——

PETER. Unprovoked, your Majesty! What greater provocation could a man wish for? Why, if I hadn't——

VELLENBURG. I'm afraid that the evidence against you will be so overwhelming that your conviction is a foregone conclusion.

PETER. Your Majesty, you surely cannot allow them to trump up this infamous charge——

QUEEN ELINOR. Why infamous? I've just seen my son. He looks as though he had been attacked by a battalion——

PETER. Well, he deserved all he got. Even if he is your son, surely you are fair enough to admit that he's a——

VELLENBURG. *(Dryly)* I think you're talking a good deal more than is good for your health, young man. Let me advise you to be quiet for a few moments and listen. The maximum sentence for the crime for which you will undoubtedly be convicted is twenty years with hard labor in the salt mines. With luck and good behavior you may possibly be released after fifteen years—if you survive. Have you ever seen a man after his release from Kronsburg? No? Well, it's not a pleasant sight. There

was a Lieutenant of Dragoons. He was only forty when they set him free. His hair was white—his back was bent—he hobbled along with the aid of a stick—led by a dog. He'd lost the sight of both his eyes——

PETER. Stop! Stop! You cold-blooded old monster, let me get out of here! Your Majesty, I beg of you——

VELLENBURG. Wait a moment. Don't be so impetuous. I was just giving you an example of what might happen to you. But as I told you yesterday—I like the look of you. I think it would be a pity for a fine young man like you to be left to such a fate—and I want to help you. That's why I sent for you.

PETER. Well, what do you want?

VELLENBURG. If I pointed out to you a way to avoid this conviction—what would you say?

PETER. I should say there was a catch in it somewhere.

VELLENBURG. *(In a harder voice)* Now, listen carefully. I have a proposal to make to you. It is of such political importance that, should you decline to accept it, you will never be at liberty to divulge it—you understand what I mean?

PETER. The threat's pretty obvious! You mean that if I refuse I shall be put out of the way.

VELLENBURG. Crudely expressed, but nevertheless true. Shall I proceed with my proposal?

PETER. Go on—yes!

VELLENBURG. The Prince of Moldavia was on the eve of departure to Wallachia with the object of becoming betrothed to the Princess Katerina. Unfortunately certain circumstances have arisen which have rendered it impossible for him to proceed. Now—you bear a most remarkable resemblance to the Prince.

PETER. What! !

VELLENBURG. A remarkable *outward* resemblance, fortunately. How would you like it if it were arranged that, instead of going to Kronsburg as a prisoner, you proceeded to Wallachia as a Prince?

PETER. But it's impossible. Why, I——

VELLENBURG. Under my personal supervision you will be instructed in your duties and your general behavior. To your friends and relations, if you have any, it will be reported that you have gone to prison. Only her Majesty, myself and the Prince's personal attendant will know that you are not in very truth the Prince.

PETER. But what do you want me to do?

VELLENBURG. You are an actor—it should not be very difficult for you to assume for a little while the role of a Prince——

PETER. The kind of part I excel in! Now, if you had seen my performance as Henry V—you would realize that this to me will be child's play—absolutely child's play——

VELLENBURG. I hope so. Anyway, you have a lot in your favor. The court of Wallachia have never seen the real Prince. They know him only by his photographs.

PETER. The court!

VELLENBURG. That will be your objective. The mission will, I am sure, hold for you a certain romantic interest, but will not be without a certain amount of—er—danger—but that, I imagine, will not deter you. By the way, you're not married, are you?

PETER. *(Pause)* No——

VELLENBURG. So much the better! Then you will have no scruples to limit you.

PETER. But, your Excellency, I don't understand it at all. You mean that you want me to go to Wallachia as the Prince—to impersonate him—?

VELLENBURG. When you leave Moldavia you will be the Prince.

PETER. What will be the object of my visit?

VELLENBURG. You will at whatever cost to yourself endeavor to bring about a formal engagement of marriage between yourself, as Prince Alexis, and Katerina of Wallachia. However exacting may be her demands, you must not refuse them. Whatever you are called upon to do to bring about this betrothal, you must regard as your duty to your country.

QUEEN ELINOR. And if he wins the approval of the Princess, and she consents to the betrothal?

VELLENBURG. Then the treaty will be provisionally signed and the war averted.

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Rising slowly)* The war averter? Well, what of Alexis?

VELLENBURG. He will remain here in the Palace, closely guarded. The news will be published that he has proceeded to Wallachia. If our young man is successful, and the marriage arranged, he will come back to Moldavia, to prepare for the wedding. At the actual ceremony his place will be taken by the real Prince, your son Alexis.

PETER. *(Quietly)* What happens to me?

VELLENBURG. What?

PETER. I say, what happens to *me,* your Excellency?

VELLENBURG. If you return, you may rest assured that you will be adequately dealt with.

PETER. It sounds a very interesting part, your Excellency.

QUEEN ELINOR. If you accept, you will be required to take a solemn oath of loyalty and secrecy even unto death. Will you be willing to take this oath?

VELLENBURG. I might remind you that the inevitable alternative is Kronsburg.

PETER. *(Pause)* I don't know quite what it's all about—but I'll take a chance.

VELLENBURG. You are very wise.

QUEEN ELINOR. Even if your mission should end fatally, you will have the great satisfaction of knowing that you are dying in the service of your country.

PETER. *(Doubtfully)* Oh!—I hope that my death isn't absolutely essential to the success of this scheme?

VELLENBURG. On the contrary——

PETER. I'm glad about that.

VELLENBURG. We have every hope that, with your natural ability, you will see the thing through to a successful conclusion, and should you return to Moldavia, you will not find her ungrateful. (VELLENBURG *goes to the door.)*

PETER. Poor old Masoch—he won't be able to open. I haven't an understudy. Don't you think you could let me play on Monday night?

VELLENBURG. I'm afraid not. The time is short and you have a lot to learn.

PETER. Don't you worry about that. Why, when I was playing in Onnawaskoff last season I went on for Hamlet in three days.

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Dryly)* I am afraid this audience will be a little more critical.

PETER. Critical! Have you ever played Onnawaskoff?

VELLENBURG. We will now go to my private suite and discuss details and make certain arrangements. From now on you are Prince Alexis of Moldavia. Peter Kraditsch is on his way to the salt mines. Now say good-bye to her Majesty.

QUEEN ELINOR. For Moldavia's sake and your own, I wish you success.

PETER. Don't you worry, your Majesty. If I'm the man I think I am, the speedy marriage of the

Princess will be arranged. *(He bows. Kisses the* QUEEN'S *hand and pats it, then turns and walks quickly off* C.*)*

(The QUEEN *looks at her hand, then up at* VELLENBURG.*)*

VELLENBURG. Well?

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Quietly)* If he's the man *I* think he is, the speedy marriage of the Princess will be essential.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I: *A room in the Winter Palace, Diniker, the Capital of Wallachia.*

TIME: *The action of this scene takes place five weeks later.*

DISCOVERED: *When the Curtain rises, the* KING (NICHOLAS) OF WALLACHIA *and* QUEEN ELIZABETH *are discovered. The* KING *is seated in an armchair* R., *reading a newspaper. The* QUEEN *is seated on sofa* L., *working on a piece of embroidery. They are two very ordinary looking people. The* KING *is short, fat, and comfortable looking. The* QUEEN *taller than he, but also fat.*

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Nicholas! *(The* KING *does not answer.)*

(Enter a MANSERVANT C.*)*

MANSERVANT. You rang, your Majesty?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Tell the Princess that we are waiting for her here. (MANSERVANT *exits* C.) Nicholas!

KING. *(Not taking his eyes from his paper. Rather irritably)* What is it, my dear?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I've been talking to you for the last five minutes and you haven't taken the slightest notice.

KING. I've heard every word—unfortunately.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. What was I talking about?

KING. The same thing that you usually talk about.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Then why didn't you answer me? *(He doesn't answer; turns over a sheet of his paper.)* I said, why didn't you answer me?

KING. I heard you.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Really, you are the most irritating man! I think the older you get the more disagreeable you become. *(The* KING *looks up from his paper; sighs in a most provoking manner, but doesn't answer her)* It will be impossible soon.

KING. *(Hopefully)* How soon?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I was talking to you about Katerina. I think it's high time——

KING. *(Disgustedly)* And you always start talking to me directly I commence to read my paper——

QUEEN ELIZABETH. If you'd take a little more interest in your daughter and a little less in your own personal pleasure, we should never have had the trouble with her that we have——

KING. I like that! God knows I've done my best to get her off our hands. Not only do I provide her with suitors, but I get rid of them for her when she decides that she has no further use for them. Incidentally I see by the paper that they're instituting an inquiry over the death of young Von Liederburg.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Which one was that?

KING. The one before last—tall, thin, sandy-haired chap. I distinctly told Zimoff that he was to be accidently shot, and the fool has him killed in a duel. And every one knows that Von Liederburg couldn't have picked a quarrel with a rabbit. Naturally his family are kicking up a hell of a row.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I think you'd better have a serious talk with Katerina. She can't go on like this or she'll be getting everybody into trouble.

KING. What can I do? I've told her that she won't be able to pick and choose much longer—it's

getting more and more difficult to get any possible men to come here at all. Naturally they are getting nervous. The only reason that Alexis of Moldavia is here is because his mother didn't dare refuse to send him on account of the treaty.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Has Katerina given you any idea as to how she likes him?

KING. Not a word—but he's been here a week and she isn't fed up yet!

QUEEN ELIZABETH. He seems a very nice young man. I do wish she'd settle on him.

KING. So do I. It's becoming increasingly difficult to artistically dispose of them. The modern girl is getting altogether too particular.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I don't blame her for that. I agree that a girl should know all about a man before she marries. She should leave nothing to chance. I only wish I had had her opportunities.

KING. I don't see what you have to grumble about——

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I don't want her to make my mistake.

KING. Mistake! Do you mean that I've been a mistake?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. For the sake of my sex, I hope so——

KING. Oh! Do you? I'd like you to know that when I was in Paris——

QUEEN ELIZABETH. My dear Nicholas, surely you're not such a fool as to believe the flattery of a mercenary creature.

KING. *(Very dignified)* The lady in question was neither a creature nor was she mercenary.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Then it must have been her first experience.

KING. *(Getting very angry)* I suppose you think you're being very clever, but let me tell you——

(Enter KATERINA C. *She is tall, dark, beautiful.)*

KATERINA. Hello. Carry on. Don't mind me. I'd hate to spoil a good row.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. My dear, your father is one of the greatest humorists of modern times.

KING. *(Spluttering with anger)* And your mother is one of the biggest——

KATERINA. Father, don't be coarse! What's the trouble, anyway?

KING. Trouble? You, of course. You are becoming a permanent bone of contention—a skeleton in the cupboard—a sinister sword of—of——

KATERINA. Damocles. Go on, Father. You're doing beautifully. What comes after that?

KING. To put it in plain language, your affairs are rapidly becoming an embarrassing nuisance.

KATERINA. I don't see why they should embarrass you. How do you think I must feel? Do you think it's very pleasant for me to be always searching for something I can never find?

KING. Well, it's certainly not from lack of material. You've already turned down five young men that I've provided for you. They couldn't all have been so impossible.

KATERINA. Oh, but they were, Father—absolutely. They were a dreadful-looking lot of weeds. *(Laughs. Sits beside* QUEEN.*)* There was something funny about every one of them. The idea of anything permanent with any of them was absolutely nauseating to me. No, Father, when I do marry I want to be certain that I'm right.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I absolutely agree with you, my dear.

KING. And what are you going to do when the supply of willing young men runs out—as it's rapidly doing?

KATERINA. Give up the unequal contest and be-

come a nun. In the meantime, however, I still live in hopes.

KING. *(Grimly)* While they die in despair, eh?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. By the way, how are you getting along with Alexis?

KATERINA. Oh, don't talk about him. He annoys me to death.

KING. *(Sighing heavily)* Oh, dear!

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I thought he seemed rather nice.

KATERINA. He is. That's why he annoys me. Do you know he's been here over a week and he's not even tried to hold my hand?

KING. That's a change for you, anyway.

KATERINA. He's not a bit like any other man I've ever met. He's so cold and casual.

KING. Takes after his mother. I remember when I went to her husband's funeral—and after the ceremony I suggested that she and I get together privately——

QUEEN ELIZABETH. That's quite enough, Nicholas.

KING. Elizabeth, you've got a terrible mind.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. *(Ignoring the* KING'S *remark)* What were you saying, my dear? About young Alexis?

KATERINA. Well, up to the moment he hasn't made the slightest attempt to make any advances. For all the effect I seem to have on him, I might be a piece of cold mutton.

KING. Perhaps he's afraid to let himself go.

KATERINA. Oh, he's not afraid. He's just indifferent. I'm beginning to wonder why he came at all.

KING. These Moldavians are a funny lot. They take an awful lot of rousing. Would you like me to give him a hint?

KATERINA. No, Father, certainly not. If I'm not

sufficiently attractive for him to want to make love to me, he can go home again.

KING. *(Sighing again)* Oh, Lord!

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Let's give the lad a fair chance. After all, he may be one of these strong, silent men.

KATERINA. Well, I wish he *would* start something.

KING. So do I. It would save a lot of bother.

KATERINA. What do you mean?

KING. Well, I want to see you safely married. Politically it will be a very good thing if this young Alexis comes up to expectations and you marry him.

KATERINA. If you think I'm going to marry a man just because it's good politics, you're mistaken. I'm going to be certain that the man I marry is going to be everything that I want.

KING. I hope you won't be disappointed.

KATERINA. I'm eliminating that possibility as far as I can.

(Through the open French windows R. *can be heard the voice of an officer turning out the guard.)*

VOICE. Guard—turn out! Present arms!

KATERINA. *(Goes to window)* It's Alexis, coming back from his ride. *(The* QUEEN *joins her at the window.)* He does look rather nice on a horse, doesn't he, Mother?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Yes, very—so tall, so straight —*(She looks at the fat* KING*)*—so slim——

KING. So sorry.

KATERINA. *(Waves her handkerchief)* Dash it all, he *won't* look up. *(She waves again)* Come up! Mother wants to see you. *(She turns into the room again)* He's coming up. Now, Father, don't say anything stupid, will you?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. No, don't talk much, Nicholas.

KATERINA. And Father, if he seems inclined to stay up here for a while,—tactfully take Mother out of the room and leave us alone for a bit, will you? Only don't make it too obvious.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. You'd better leave it to me, my dear. Your father doesn't know the meaning of the word tact.

KATERINA. For heaven's sake, don't let the man come up and find you two bickering! Father, you sit in your armchair and be reading your paper. Mother, get on with your embroidery or whatnot—*(She thrusts the needlework from sofa into the* QUEEN'S *hand)* I shall sit here, idly toying with a magazine. There we are. A perfect picture of family bliss. *(Pause.)*

(Enter PETER, *alias* ALEXIS, R. *He is in uniform. He bows stiffly to the* KING *and* QUEEN, *then to* KATERINA.*)*

PETER. I saw you waving from the window, so I came up. You—er—wanted to see me?

KATERINA. Oh, *Mother* thought she'd like to see you. She's been wondering how you were enjoying your stay here.

KING. Sit down, my boy—sit down. (PETER *sits between* KATERINA *and* QUEEN.*)*

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Did you have a good ride?

PETER. Well, I did and I didn't. I shall enjoy it better when I get used to it.

KATERINA. What! Get used to riding! But surely you——

PETER. *(Realizing that he has made a blunder)* I mean used to the horse I was riding.

KATERINA. But you were up on the gentlest old hack we have in the stables.

PETER. I thought there was something wrong with it. You see—in my stables at home I've got some of the wildest beasts you could imagine. I suppose that is why I was so uncomfortable on the wretched nag I had today.

KING. Hm! Then I've got something you'll enjoy; a big, raw-boned black—standing about eighteen hands. A regular killer, my boy. The last man who tried to, if I remember, was one of Katerina's admirers. He'd only been here a week, poor fellow——literally kicked to pieces he was——

PETER. Oh, really! How sad! I'll go and look at the brute tomorrow morning. They can't be too wild for me.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. You must be careful. If anything happened to you while you were here, your mother would never forgive me. (KING *chuckles loudly.*) What on earth's the matter with you, Nicholas?

KING. I was just thinking that if anything *did* happen to our friend here—God forbid—that old fox Vellenburg would be in a very awkward position.

KATERINA. Really, Father, you must control your quaint sense of humor.

PETER. Oh, don't mind me.

KING. Oh, nothing personal, I assure you. I was only wondering if you realized how important that alliance with us is to him.

PETER. Oh, yes, I realize *that,* all right. I want to go into that matter with you, your Highness. Now supposing——

KATERINA. For heaven's sake, don't drag politics in here. I'm utterly sick and tired of them. Let's talk about something else.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I quite agree with Katerina. *(Awkward pause)* Are you interested in the theater, Alexis?

PETER. *(He starts)* I beg your pardon?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I said, are you interested in the theater?

PETER. Oh, yes! Oh, yes! I used to be terribly keen—but I've given it up lately.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Because our new theater is opening tomorrow night. They're giving a performance of Hamlet. By the way, Nicholas, I hope you've kept tomorrow night open. We shall be expected to be there, you know.

KING. All right. Only don't try to keep me awake, because it can't be done.

PETER. I gather that you are not a lover of the drama, sir?

KING. Not the kind we get in Diniker. Now, when I was in Paris, a few weeks ago, I went every night.

KATERINA. To the same show, I expect. *(To* PETER*)* You see, Father likes nothing left to the imagination.

PETER. *(Heatedly)* I think it's a positive disgrace!

KING. What!!

PETER. I mean the degenerate tastes of the modern theatergoer. They have already desecrated the Great Bard's immortal works by playing them in modern clothes. We shall soon have "What Ho Othello!" set to jazz music—"The Merchant of Venice" with a naked Venetian beauty chorus. It means that the legitimate drama will soon cease to exist—*(Rising and striking himself on the chest)* It means unemployment for thousands of deserving actors. I tell you, this wave of sex and jazz is an appalling thing.

KATERINA. Why should you worry, anyway?

PETER. *(Realizing he has gone a little too far. Sits)* Oh, it means nothing to me, personally; but I do think that we, in our position, should set the

people a good example and attend only such performances as befit the dignity of the true theater.

KING. Every one to his taste, but give me jazz and sex. *(To the* QUEEN*)* He can go to Hamlet instead of me.

PETER. I should love to. By the way, do you happen to know who's playing Hamlet?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. No, I'm afraid I don't.

PETER. The best Hamlet I ever saw was a young Moldavian actor called Peter Kraditsch. He was magnificent.

KING. Never heard of him.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Nicholas, I think you'd better go and change for dinner.

KING. Oh, there's plenty of time.

KATERINA. You know how long it takes *you,* Father.

KING. *(Obviously taking the hint)* Oh, yes—yes, quite—and I'll take your mother with me. She takes a long time, too. *(To the* QUEEN*)* And the next time you tell them I have no tact——

QUEEN ELIZABETH. *(Rising; to* ALEXIS*)* Perhaps you will join us in a little quiet, informal dinner——

PETER. Thanks. I should love to.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Seven o'clock, then. Come along, Nicholas. *(Exits* C.*)*

PETER. I suppose I'd better go and change, too—

KING. Oh, no. There's no hurry for you. You look as if you could change in no time—doesn't he, Katerina? *(Exits* C.*)*

PETER. What did he mean by that?

KATERINA. He made it pretty obvious that he wanted to leave us alone together.

PETER. That was nice of him, but——

KATERINA. But what? Don't you want to be alone with me?

PETER. Would you mind if we didn't discuss that?

KATERINA. Yes, I would—I want to discuss it. You must give me a reason for this sudden change of front.

PETER. I don't understand you.

KATERINA. Oh, yes, you do. Can you deny that you have changed since you first came here?

PETER. Well—perhaps I've got over my first enthusiasm. Yes!

KATERINA. But why? Am I any different?

PETER. No, it isn't that.

KATERINA. Then what is it?

PETER. What is what?

KATERINA. Oh, you know perfectly well. The first day you came here you—you were terribly attracted—at least you seemed to be. Even Father noticed it—but gradually since then you've been on the wane——

PETER. Aren't you imagining a lot——

KATERINA. Is it my imagination that for the last few days you have obviously avoided being alone with me—that you have been trying to keep out of my way? What's the matter with you? Are you afraid of me?

PETER. Do you think there's any reason that I should be afraid?

KATERINA. You apparently do.

PETER. Afraid of you! *(He laughs not too convincingly)* What nonsense!

KATERINA. Then why do you avoid me?

PETER. *(Impetuously)* I don't want to avoid you. I—— *(He pulls himself up)* Haven't I asked you to play tennis with me—to go riding—to—to swim with me—to play golf—to——

KATERINA. Oh, yes. You can think of more outdoor things to do than any man I ever knew.

PETER. I find it healthier out of doors.

KATERINA. What do you mean by that?

PETER. Oh, nothing. But what I've heard of my predecessors, Rustoc, Semonich, Von Liederburg, is not exactly encouraging.

KATERINA. Then you fear to attempt where others have failed?

PETER. Who am I that I should be more successful than they?

KATERINA. At least they were men enough to take a big chance to get the woman they wanted. Of course, if you are utterly devoid of any physical feelings, you're more to be pitied. I wonder you came to Wallachia at all.

PETER. I can assure you that this visit was more thrust upon me than sought after.

KATERINA. Poor boy—did his mother make him come?

PETER. No, she didn't! My keen sense of duty made me come.

KATERINA. Now wave a little flag and sing "God Save the Queen."

PETER. I was referring rather to my duty to myself than to my country.

KATERINA. I suppose you haven't forgotten in the meantime what your duty is now that you *are* here.

PETER. No, I haven't. I'm here for your approval. If you consider me a fit candidate for matrimonial honors, you've only to say the word and tell your father. The treaty will then be signed and I can go back safely home.

KATERINA. *(Rising; crosses* R.*)* Oh, my God! What a man! What a lover! Of all the cold-blooded, calculating—— Do you think any woman would want you under these circumstances? Is this all you propose doing to—to—win me?

PETER. What more can I do?

KATERINA. Doesn't your instinct tell you?

PETER. I've given up using it. It's unreliable.

KATERINA. Have you never made love to a woman?

PETER. Oh, yes—but under different circumstances. There was no forfeit if I failed.

KATERINA. I see, you're the kind of man who likes to gamble on a certainty.

PETER. *(Goaded at last into losing his temper; rises)* No, I'm not. You're a young, beautiful woman, and if things were different and if I didn't know all about the other men—if I were not just a political pawn, I should probably be dazzled enough to become crazy about you.

KATERINA. *(Laughing at him)* Oh, really!

PETER. *(Getting more angry)* Yes! But thank God, since I've been here I've found out what kind of a woman you really are.

KATERINA. How interesting!

PETER. *(Now thoroughly aroused)* No, just disgusting. You're a seeker after new sensation! What happened to those other men who came here to please you? You let them make love to you until you were tired of them, then they were conveniently disposed of.

KATERINA. How dare you say that? I refuse to listen to your insolence. *(She attempts to leave him. He catches her by the arm.)*

PETER. You're going to listen until I've finished. I want to tell you this. If you think I'm going to fall down at your feet and worship you, pander to your desires for a few hours, only to be garroted to avoid a scandal when you're tired of me, you're making a terrible mistake. It would do you all the good in the world for a man to come along who cared enough for you to give you a damned good thrashing——

KATERINA. Oh, Alexis, how wonderful—— *(She goes close to him)* Would you really hurt me?

PETER. By God, I'd like to! *(Her face is close to his. He can resist her no longer. He snatches her into his arms and kisses her violently, then holding her at arms' length again)* Now, I suppose——

KATERINA. *(Puts hand over* PETER'S *mouth)* No —don't let's talk much. Kiss me again. *(He breaks away from her.)*

PETER. *(Violently)* No! No!

KATERINA. But Alexis, you're wonderful. I didn't dream you were like this. Why are you so distrustful?

PETER. What about all the other men?

KATERINA. Why don't you make me forget that any other man ever existed but you——

PETER. Oh, if I only could!

KATERINA. Why not try? *(She is standing close to him and looking up invitingly. He is about to take her in his arms again, when he suddenly pulls himself up and walks away from her.)*

PETER. No, no! I mustn't—I can't!

KATERINA. *(Laughing at him)* You mean you daren't!

PETER. *(Turning on her)* I dare anything! But if you think I'm going to be made a fool of like all the others——

KATERINA. Why talk about the others?

PETER. I want to talk about them! I want to know what they meant to you! How much they were to you!

KATERINA. And I'm not going to tell you.

PETER. Because you're ashamed to—that's it, isn't it? *Isn't it?*

KATERINA. *(Laughing at him)* If you like.

PETER. Oh! You make me furious!

KATERINA. Obviously.

PETER. *(Turning on her)* I wouldn't mind so much if you'd only be honest with me—— If you'd only confess to me——

KATERINA. Confess what?

PETER. *(Haltingly)* That you're a—that you've been—— *(He stops.)*

KATERINA. Well, go on.

PETER. Oh, you know damned well what I mean! I want to know the truth. What about all those other men?

KATERINA. I shall never ask you what about all the other women—that's fair enough, isn't it?

PETER. No, it isn't. I have different ideas——

KATERINA. We can't discuss things here. Father and mother will be down again in a minute or two. Come to me tonight after they've all gone to bed—and I'll explain everything to you. I'll prove to you that I can really love you. Nobody has meant anything in my life up to now—but I feel that you are the man I've been waiting for.

PETER. *(Excitedly)* I suppose that is the story that you told them all. No wonder that they couldn't resist you—but by God, I can!

KATERINA. You mean you won't come to me tonight?

PETER. No! I'd rather go to the salt mines!

(Enter KING C. *in a dressing-gown.)*

KING. I say! I say! What's all this shouting about? You'll disturb the servants.

KATERINA. Were we making a noise? I didn't notice it. Alexis has been telling me a most amusing story about a blind man.

KING. Oh! Well, it sounded to me more like a dog fight. Hadn't you better get along and change, Katerina?

KATERINA. I think perhaps I had. See you at dinner, Alexis. *(Exit* KATERINA C. *Pause.)*

KING. I've a shrewd suspicion that I interrupted a lovers' quarrel. *(He laughs gutturally)* It's al-

ways a good sign, my boy, when you can get their goats.

PETER. Yes, sir.

KING. Don't let her get the upper hand. Think of Moldavia and go in and win.

PETER. Supposing I—go in and lose?

KING. Don't let your mind dwell on that possibility. You might win. *(Enter* BLONDEL R., *the* KING'S *private secretary, bodyguard and general factotum. He is a big, muscular, formidable-looking man.)* Hello, Blondel. What do you want?

BLONDEL. There's a man downstairs who's been worrying me for the last few days to get him a private audience with you. I've tried to put him off, but he says it's of great political importance.

KING. *(Irritably)* What on earth do you mean by bothering me with this kind of thing? Tell him I'm in conference. He may be some damned anarchist for all I know.

BLONDEL. Oh, no. He's been thoroughly searched. He's probably some trade's union official who wants you to lay a foundation stone or unveil a statue. I think you had better see him.

KING. *(Wearily)* Very well. What's his name?

BLONDEL. Masoch—Paul Masoch.

PETER. *(Involuntarily)* Masoch! !

KING. All right. Bring him up! *(Exit* BLONDEL R.*)* Awful nuisance, these people, but we can't afford to offend them. If the big trades unions turned nasty, Wallachia would turn republic in a week and I should have to spend the rest of my life at some awful English health resort alone with my wife. *(He shudders.)*

PETER. I think I'll go, your Majesty. You'll probably want to interview this man alone.

KING. On the contrary, I don't like being alone with these people. Anyway, it can't be anything particularly private.

PETER. Then I'll go out on the balcony until he's gone.

(Enter BLONDEL R. PETER *hurriedly exits on to balcony* R.*)*

BLONDEL. Paul Masoch, your Highness.

KING. All right, Blondel. Wait outside the door. (BLONDEL *turns.)* And Blondel, don't go too far away.

BLONDEL. This way, please.

(Enter MASOCH R., *after giving his hat and cane to* BLONDEL, *making an extravagant bow.* BLONDEL *exits* R.*)*

MASOCH. Your Majesty's obedient and humble servant.

KING. Well, what do you want to see me about?

MASOCH. *(With great unction)* Although I have not the honor of being one of your Majesty's subjects, I am at the present——

KING. Oh, you're not a Wallachian? Where do you come from?

MASOCH. Moldavia, your Majesty. My visit to your beautiful city is unfortunately a brief one. I am an actor, and I am appearing here this week in Hamlet. Perhaps you know the play——

KING. No, I don't.

MASOCH. Oh! Well, I am playing the second grave-digger—a wonderful part, if a trifle small. I should be playing the first but for a case of professional jealousy which I will not enlarge upon at the moment.

KING. *(Sitting on sofa)* I'm glad about that.

MASOCH. Now, when I had my own company, I always——

KING. I haven't the time to listen to the story of your life. Will you come to the point?

MASOCH. It is necessary to tell you something about myself in order to impress you with the fact that I have no ulterior motive in telling you what I came here to—er—er—to tell you.

KING. Well?

MASOCH. *(Impressively)* Your Majesty, you are nuturing a viper in your bosom!

KING. What?

MASOCH. A snake in the grass—a wolf in sheep's clothing!

KING. What the devil are you talking about?

MASOCH. The Prince Alexis of Moldavia.

KING. Well, what about him?

MASOCH. The man who is masquerading to you as the Prince is not a Prince at all. He is an actor—well known to me. He was a member of my stock company in Baroc. When I saw him out riding a few days ago I was thunderstruck. I couldn't believe my eyes—so I watched for him to come out of the Palace the next day and I followed him. I heard him talk and I knew I was right. His voice, his manners, his gestures, his walk leave not the slightest cause to doubt that he is Peter Kraditsch, an actor in my company at Baroc. It was his fault that I had to shut down. *(He raises his voice angrily)* It was his fault that I, Paul Masoch, am touring around, playing a lousy part in a third-rate company—while he is living like a Prince. *(He advances toward the* KING, *who rises and retreats nervously.)* Imposing on *you!!* On Wallachia!! On everybody!!! *(He is shouting loudly by this time.)*

KING. *(Shouts)* Blondel! Alexis!! (BLONDEL *enters* R. PETER *from balcony. To* BLONDEL) What the devil do you mean by allowing this lunatic in here?

MASOCH. *(Dashes over to* PETER, *but is pounced on by* BLONDEL, *who holds him by the collar and*

arm) Ask him to deny it. Ask him to deny that he is Peter Kraditsch, a third-rate actor. (PETER *smiles but doesn't say anything.)*

KING. *(To* BLONDEL*)* Take him down to the cells. Have a doctor see him at once. Don't let him go. He's dangerous! (BLONDEL *drags* MASOCH *to the door* R.*)*

MASOCH. *(Frantically shouting)* No! No!! Don't let them take me away like this. For God's sake, let me go! It was only a joke, if you like! Let me go—— *(He is dragged out* R. *by* BLONDEL. *His shouts are heard going down the corridor.)*

PETER. *(Quietly)* Poor old Masoch!

KING. *(Sits on sofa)* Poor be damned! Blondel ought to be shot for allowing a man like that to come up here. He might have strangled me——

PETER. No, I don't think he would have done that.

KING. I must apologize to you, Alexis. Damned annoying for you. I wonder how he got *that* bee in his bonnet.

PETER. It's not so extraordinary.

KING. I suppose somebody he thought looked a bit like you ruined him and it turned his brain.

PETER. No, he's sane enough.

KING. What?

PETER. He was speaking the truth. I *am* an impostor!

KING. You'd better see a doctor too.

PETER. I tell you I am not Prince Alexis of Moldavia. I'm sick to death of this intriguing and lying and masquerading. You can do what you like about it. Deal with me here in Wallachia, or send me back to Moldavia and they can send me to their damned salt mines——

KING. You're not the Prince? *(Pause. Craftily)* Send you back to Moldavia? So that's the idea, is it? Very cleverly thought out, my friend. An old actor

with a cock and bull story, and a safe passage out of Wallachia for you. Oh, no—you don't get away as easily as that!

PETER. But good God—I tell you it's true——

KING. Now listen, Alexis. I know damn well that you didn't want to come here, and all you want is to get away safely. But let me tell you something. Now you're here, you've got to stay until she either refuses or accepts you—and nobody will be more pleased than I if she accepts——

PETER. But don't you understand? I am not what you think I am——

KING. *(Turns on him)* Now, don't try that one again or I'll get angry with you. There's no earthly reason why you shouldn't pull off this betrothal——

PETER. Then you refuse to believe that I am an actor?

KING. Not a good enough one to fool me, my lad.

PETER. Then I must be giving a remarkable performance.

KING. You certainly are! *(He laughs)* Remember, I'm all for you. If there's anything I can do to help, you've only got to say the word.

PETER. Thank you.

(KATERINA *enters* C.)

KING. Now I'm going down to have a pick-me-up before dinner. I feel all shot to pieces. *(He starts for door and sees* KATERINA*)* If your mother asks where I am, tell her I'm up in my study writing my diary. *(Exits* C.*)*

(PETER *goes to window and looks out.* KATERINA *watches him for a few seconds.)*

KATERINA. Hadn't you better go and change?

PETER. *(Turns quickly)* Oh, yes—yes, I suppose

I had. *(He walks slowly toward the* C. *door; turns)* I wonder if there is anything of the real woman in your make-up?

KATERINA. Why this sudden interest?

PETER. I wonder if you're capable of really caring for anybody?

KATERINA. I shouldn't let that worry you.

PETER. But it does worry me.

KATERINA. Really! Why?

PETER. Because, if I thought you had one spark of decency in you I would be frank with you—I would tell you what I want to tell you.

KATERINA. If you've staved down here merely to be rude to me again—you'd better go.

PETER. I think under the circumstances I'm perfectly justified in—asking you—er——

KATERINA. Asking me what?

PETER. About all those men!

KATERINA. I had nothing to do with what happened to them.

PETER. I don't care a damn what happened to them. I want to know what they were to you—what you were to them! !

KATERINA. *(Turning on him)* You think because I haven't been satisfied with the crude efforts of a lot of immature youths or dissipated old men that I'm a bad woman——

PETER. I didn't say that. I was asking if——

KATERINA. How would you like it if you were a woman whom they were trying to force to marry somebody she didn't care a damn about? I want a man who cares for me and wants to marry me just for myself—not because of his country or his mother —or some wretched old treaty. And because I've turned down a few half-baked men who could never interest me in any way whatever, you say—"Have you a spark of decency?" How dare *you* ask me that—you? You only came here because you were

forced to, and now you *are* here, you haven't even the courage to—to——

PETER. It's not a question of courage.

KATERINA. Just a coward who is afraid of being turned down.

PETER. Katerina, listen to me—I should have been a greater coward if I'd attempted to make love to you without first telling you——

KATERINA. I don't want to know anything. If I cared for a man, nothing that he was, nothing that he'd done before I met him would make the slightest difference to me.

PETER. Even if he were not the man you thought he was?

KATERINA. Nothing would matter.

PETER. You mean that?

KATERINA. Of course I do.

PETER. And do you mean what you said a little while ago—when you said that perhaps I was the man you had been waiting for?

KATERINA. Did I say that?

PETER. Yes, you did—you know you did, Katerina. I think I loved you from the first moment I saw you. I'm absolutely crazy about you. I *was* a coward. I *was* afraid—afraid if you accepted me it would be because I came to you as Prince Alexis.

KATERINA. If I loved you, I wouldn't care what you were.

PETER. Would you mind saying that all over again?

KATERINA. If I loved you, nothing would make any difference.

PETER. Then tell me—you love me.

KATERINA. I'll tell you tonight.

PETER. You want me to come to you? You really want me to?

KATERINA. Yes.

PETER. *(Goes to her and takes her in his arms)*

Then I can at least hold you in my arms and call you mine tonight whatever may happen tomorrow.

KATERINA. What can happen tomorrow?

PETER. I daren't think. I don't want to spoil tonight. *(He laughs.)*

KATERINA. What are you laughing at?

PETER. I was thinking of some lines I once heard in a play—"Tomorrow I shall be mortally sober. Tonight I am divinely drunk. Tonight, if I dared, I would ease my heart"—and the woman says—"You may say what you please tonight," and he answers her, "If I were to die tomorrow, I would tell you this tonight—I love you."

KATERINA. That sounds very sad. It almost depresses me.

PETER. Then you mustn't think about it, my sweet. *(They kiss, and again.)*

KATERINA. Now you must go and change. They'll be down for dinner. Hurry——

PETER. *(He dashes to the door* C.; *turns suddenly)* Oh, how I hate to leave you!! *(He exits quickly, banging the door.)*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE II: *Same as Act II, Scene I.*

TIME: *The next morning.*

BLONDEL, *the* KING'S SECRETARY, *enters. He is carrying a pile of letters which he arranges in a neat pile on the desk. He places the morning paper on the desk. He looks at his watch and walks up to the window. Then, presumably from a church not far away, there comes the pealing of bells, which continues until some time later in the scene.*

The KING *enters* C. *He has the air of a man who has accomplished a difficult task extremely well. And is very affable and smiling.* BLONDEL *comes down from the window to greet him.*

KING. *(Rubbing his hands)* Good morning, Blondel. We're a little late this morning, but we have been very busy. *(He sits at desk.)*

BLONDEL. If I may be permitted, may I offer your Majesty my sincere congratulations?

KING. Ah! So you've heard already, eh? Who told you?

BLONDEL. Well, your Majesty, I had a hint early this morning from the first maid to the Princess—and when the bells started to peal—I gathered that the rumor was not unfounded.

KING. These damn maids talk too much. However, far be it from me to be censorious on a morning like this. I might tell you, Blondel, it is very gratifying to me to have brought this affair to such a satisfactory conclusion.

BLONDEL. It must be a great relief to your Majesty—after so many unsuccessful attempts.

KING. Eh? Oh, yes, yes; quite. *(He is looking at his letters)* Anything here of particular interest?

BLONDEL. Nothing at all, your Majesty, except another note about the Von Liederburg case. They want to know——

KING. Now, why remind me of that, on this of all mornings? Turn the whole thing over to Stranslinger and tell him to deal with it. Is that all?

BLONDEL. That's all, your Majesty.

KING. Good. Now I want you to send off a few telegrams for me. First of all, one to Count Vellenburg. (BLONDEL *sits beside desk and takes out notebook.* KING *dictating)* "Count Vellenburg, Baroc, Moldavia: Publicly announcing betrothal Princess Katerina and Prince Alexis today—treaty provisionally signed. I am returning Alexis to Moldavia tonight. Up to you to arrange speedy wedding. Nicholas."

BLONDEL. Very good, your Majesty.

KING. Send one of congratulations to Queen Elinor—same address. Make a note to remind me that Prince Alexis is to be made Colonel of the Palace Guards, Colonel of Mobile Artillery, Chief of the Diniker Police, Commander-in-Chief of the Fire Brigade and Big Chief Boy Scout,—all honorary, of course. By the way, give him a hint to order all his uniforms here. It'll make him popular with the tradespeople.

BLONDEL. Very good, your Majesty.

KING. I think that's all for the moment.

BLONDEL. What about that man, Masoch?

KING. Masoch—Masoch—who the devil's—— Oh, that mad actor chap. Have him photographed, his finger prints taken, and deport him at once. Mark his papers, undesirable alien, mentally defi-

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cient, so that *he'll* never get back in *this* country again.

BLONDEL. Is that all, your Majesty?

KING. Yes, I—oh, you'd better order them to shoot that big black horse. I sha'n't be wanting him now. Have you made notes of everything?

BLONDEL. Yes, your Majesty.

KING. Good. You may go now. (BLONDEL *goes to* C. *door.)* Oh, Blondel! (BLONDEL *stops.)*

BLONDEL. Your Majesty?

KING. Have them find out if the Prince Alexis is up yet, and if he is, he is to be told that I would like to see him here. If he is still in bed, he is not to be disturbed. (BLONDEL *bows and exits* C. KING *goes to the telephone)* Put me through to the Princess' apartment.—Hello—hello—— Is that you, Anna? Is the Princess there?—What, already? Well, when she comes back, tell her——

(KATERINA *has entered* C. *as he commenced to telephone.)*

KATERINA. Tell her what, Father?

KING. *(Replaces the telephone and embraces his daughter effusively)* My darling girl, this is one of the happiest moments of my life. Your mother told me the news at nine o'clock this morning, immediately after you had telephoned her. Accept the loving congratulations of your poor old father.

KATERINA. I'm sure it must be a great relief to you. You *have* worked hard on my behalf, haven't you?

KING. Thank God, not without success, my child. I am proud to think that at last I have been the means of your meeting a man you think is everything to be desired.

KATERINA. Oh, I don't know him well enough to say that!

KING. *(Apprehensively)* Why, my dear, is there anything—er——?

KATERINA. *(Laughing)* No, Father, Alexis is wonderful. Oh, if I'd only met him before.

KING. Then you wouldn't have known how wonderful he was, so don't worry about that. Never regret any past that makes the present more appreciated. That's not bad, is it? *(Chuckles.)*

KATERINA. Very good, Father.

KING. Now, my dear, I want to give you a few words of advice before your mother gets at you. Don't have a long, weary, protracted engagement.

KATERINA. No, but——

KING. I should like the date of your wedding fixed before Alexis returns home tonight.

KATERINA. Tonight!

KING. Oh, yes; in fact, he was particular to impress it on me the first day he arrived here.

KATERINA. I don't think he'll be so keen to go now. *(She goes to the window)* Oh, what a divine morning!

KING. It always is!

KATERINA. Where's mother?

KING. I don't know. She was so excited at your news that she became very abusive to me. Quaint woman, your mother.

(Enter PETER C.*)*

PETER. You wanted to see me, sir?

KING. Of course I wanted to see you. *(He kisses* PETER *on both cheeks)* You should be a very proud man this morning.

PETER. *(Holding out his hands to* KATERINA*)* A very grateful and a very humble man, your Majesty.

KATERINA. *(Goes to him and stands with her arm around him)* Isn't that nice, Father?

KING. Well, it's not a bad way to start, anyway.

KATERINA. Alexis, Father's just told me that you want to go back to Moldavia at once.

PETER. It's not a question of whether I want to or not. You see——

KING. Exactly. I was telling Katerina that the sooner you get back to Moldavia the sooner you will be married. By the way, Alexis, I hope you are not a believer in long engagements?

PETER. What does Katerina say about it?

KATERINA. I am in your hands, O King!

KING. That's the spirit. Then everything will be all right. You can go back tonight, as arranged, Alexis—taking the treaty to Vellenburg—and make all arrangements for the wedding to take place in a few weeks' time.

PETER. When will the engagement be formally announced?

KING. The whole city already knows. At one o'clock I have arranged that you and the Princess shall drive together to the Cathedral. You will be received there by the Archbishop of Diniker, and the betrothal publicly proclaimed from the Cathedral steps, as is our ancient custom. There will be festivities all over the city for the rest of the day. A state dinner in the Palace here tonight before you catch the midnight train for Moldavia. Is that all right with both of you?

KATERINA. I suppose it has to be—but I don't see why——

KING. I haven't any time to argue the point now, my dear. I've a lot of things to do before the parade, so I'll leave you. You haven't much time, either. Don't forget the state coach will be here for you both in a quarter of an hour.

PETER. Very good, sir.

KING. Good-bye for the present, my children. *(He goes to* C. *door. Unctuously)* And a proud father's blessing on you both! *(Exits.)*

(As soon as the door closes behind the KING, PETER *takes* KATERINA *in his arms and kisses her.)*

KATERINA. Then you don't regret?

PETER. Regret it! It was all so wonderful that I can't believe that it can have happened to me. I am terrified that at any moment I shall wake up and my beautiful princess will have disappeared and my dream be over.

KATERINA. My sweet, we shall soon be together forever and nothing that can happen will ever separate us.

PETER. Oh, my God!

KATERINA. What's the matter?

PETER. Just the thought of losing you, darling.

(MASOCH *suddenly appears on the balcony* R. *He peers into the room.* PETER *and* KATERINA *do not see him. He hides behind the curtains.)*

KATERINA. Then why are you in such a hurry to get away? Must you really go back tonight?

PETER. I'm afraid I must. You see, darling, Vellenburg expects me to—and I promised—the Queen——

KATERINA. I don't see why you should go back at all. Why can't we be married here soon?

PETER. *(Apprehensively)* No! No, it's impossible!

KATERINA. Of course, if you *want* to go so badly, I won't attempt to stop you.

PETER. Katerina, you don't understand. If I had only myself to think of, nothing on God's earth would make me leave you for a minute. Oh, God! If I could only tell you—I—I'm not—I'm not my own master in this—I must go back to Moldavia.

KATERINA. But *why must* you?

(There is a shriek of hysterical laughter from behind the curtains. They both turn, and MASOCH *emerges. He is wild-eyed, unshaven and unkempt.* KATERINA *runs to* PETER *for protection.)*

MASOCH. *(His mind is almost unhinged by the injustice of his imprisonment. He is almost incoherent)* Ask him again why he must go back and see if he'll tell you the truth.

PETER. How the devil did you get in here?

MASOCH. They left the window of my cell open and I climbed out.

KATERINA. Who are you, and what do you want?

MASOCH. Ask him who I am. He'll tell you!

PETER. I'll give you ten seconds to get out by the way you came, or I'll call the guard.

MASOCH. You see he daren't—he's afraid. I tried to tell your father about it yesterday, but he wouldn't believe me. Had me put in a cell like a mad beast. But you'll believe me. You're a woman. He's not the Prince Alexis at all——

PETER. *(Going to* C. *door, opens it, shouts)* Blondel! Blondel!

MASOCH. *(Shouting)* Shout as hard as you like, Judas. You can't stop me! His name's Peter Kraditsch. He's no more a Prince than I am!! He's an actor!! I knew him well in Moldavia!! Look at him now and see if I'm telling the truth. Ask him.

KATERINA. Alexis, what does this mean?

MASOCH. Call him Peter. He'll understand you better!!

(BLONDEL *enters* C.)

PETER. This poor fool managed to escape. Take him away.

MASOCH. Yes, take me away now and I don't care

a damn—because she believes me! She knows he's nothing more than a foul impostor——

BLONDEL. Quiet, you fool!

MASOCH. A cheat, a mercenary who sold himself to a dirty politician. (BLONDEL *twists his arm and he shrieks with the pain of it.)*

PETER. Don't hurt him, Blondel. He's not responsible.

MASOCH. Thank you for those kind words, Prince —Prince! ! Ha, ha! *(He laughs hysterically)* What a performance! *(He suddenly quiets and turns to* BLONDEL, *and with great dignity)* As for you, I bear you no ill will, laddie. Duty is duty and I return to the place of incarceration with a comparatively light heart. Adieu, Princess. *(He bows)* Farewell, Peter—how well they named you. *(He turns to* BLONDEL*)* Could you by any chance imitate the crowing of a cock—— (BLONDEL *pushes him out* R. *door and shuts it behind them.)*

KATERINA. Who is he? What did he mean, Alexis? What did he mean by—by everything?

PETER. I tried to tell you yesterday—but you wouldn't listen. I tried to tell your father, but he wouldn't believe me. He thought it was a trick to get away.

KATERINA. A trick? What are you talking about?

PETER. I am not Prince Alexis.

KATERINA. You're not——

PETER. I am Peter Kraditsch, once an actor in that poor devil's company.

KATERINA. But it isn't possible—it isn't true.

PETER. The real Prince was afraid to come here. His mother and Vellenburg sent me instead.

KATERINA. How could you do so foul a thing?

PETER. I didn't want to. I was offered it as an alternative to a living death in the salt mines. What could I do?

KATERINA. So you kept up this deception—this

mockery, even to—allowing my father to announce the betrothal. How much longer did you intend to keep it up?

PETER. Until I got back to Moldavia. The real Prince was to have taken my place at the wedding.

KATERINA. And I shouldn't have known the difference, I suppose? What sort of a fool do they take me for?

PETER. He is so like me that the scheme stood a chance of success. Don't you understand, Katerina? When I first came here I tried to keep away from you—but after I saw you I knew that that was impossible. I was not lying to you when I told you that I loved you from the first moment I saw you.

KATERINA. Why bother to keep up this pretense any longer?

PETER. I swear to you that it is true. I tried to tell you before last night, but you said that nothing that I was could make any difference if you loved me. Then I could resist no longer. I decided to take what the gods offered me. For one bit of happiness, I sacrificed everything—myself—my country——

KATERINA. And me too—— Oh, how could you do it? How could you? *(She is crying.)*

PETER. My only excuse is that I love you—I shall go on loving you.

KATERINA. *(She looks at him for a second without speaking, then)* I thought at last I'd found a man who could make me happy—and now it's all over—— What's going to happen to us?

PETER. It's fairly obvious what's going to happen to me. In a few minutes your father will know everything. He will either send me back to Moldavia to the tender mercies of Vellenburg, or——

KATERINA. Father will never let you leave Wallachia—he'll kill you——

PETER. I'm afraid that will be his one ambition.

KATERINA. Oh, my God, what shall I do——

PETER. Just tell me that you forgive me—then ring the bell and send for your father and get this business over—— *(There is a pause. She walks back to* PETER.*)*

KATERINA. Alexis, do you swear that you love me?

PETER. On the word of a dying man, I swear it.

KATERINA. Then I shall go through with it.

PETER. What do you mean?

KATERINA. Nobody here but that poor half-wit knows who you are. And they'll never believe him. You must go back to Moldavia tonight, arrange for the wedding, and I will marry the real Prince Alexis.

PETER. Do you think I would let you sacrifice yourself like that, just to save me?

KATERINA. It's not just to save you. By this time my father will have had the news of my engagement cabled halfway around the world. If this business came out now, the country would be the laughing-stock of Europe and I should be an international object of ridicule.

BLONDEL. *(Enters* R.*)* The state coach is outside waiting to take your Highness to the Cathedral.

KATERINA. We shall be down immediately. *(Exit* BLONDEL R.*)*

PETER. Katerina, I won't, I can't go through with this.

KATERINA. Why not? You've played your part so well up to now.

PETER. Very well, Katerina—I'll finish the act. Positively the last appearance of Peter Kraditsch as Prince Alexis of Moldavia.

(KATERINA *gives him her arm. They start* R. *as curtain falls.)*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I: *Same as Act I, Scene II.*

TIME: *Six weeks later.*

DISCOVERED: *When the curtain rises the* QUEEN OF MOLDAVIA *is seated* L. *at table.*

MANSERVANT. *(Enters* C.*)* You sent for me, your Majesty?

QUEEN ELINOR. Where is the Prince?

MANSERVANT. When I left him, a few seconds ago, he was just stepping into his bath, your Majesty.

QUEEN ELINOR. Why was I unable to get a reply when I phoned the Prince's apartment half an hour ago?

MANSERVANT. Because we were not there, your Majesty.

QUEEN ELINOR. I know that, idiot. I'm asking you why wasn't my son there?

MANSERVANT. He had certain business to attend to which detained him until this morning.

QUEEN ELINOR. Are you telling me that my son stayed out all night?

MANSERVANT. We arrived back at the Palace ten minutes ago.

QUEEN ELINOR. So. I told you never to let him out of your sight.

MANSERVANT. And I followed your Majesty's orders to the letter—as far as delicacy would permit. I accompanied his Highness to the very doors of the lady's house. Your Majesty will understand that I could go no further.

QUEEN ELINOR. Go and tell him to come here to me as soon as possible.

MANSERVANT. Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN ELINOR. *(With heavy sarcasm)* And you might remind him, in case he has forgotten, that he is being married this afternoon.

(Exit MANSERVANT C. *Enter* VELLENBURG C. *His usual urbanity seems to have left him, for he is irritable and perturbed.)*

VELLENBURG. You seem upset, your Majesty. Has anything happened to our Royal Highness again?

QUEEN ELINOR. Yes, Vellenburg. *(She pauses)* That Duvigny woman!

VELLENBURG. I thought he couldn't go through with it without some trouble.

QUEEN ELINOR. What a pity he isn't a little enthusiastic about it all.

(Enter PRINCE ALEXIS C. *He is tired looking and dissipated.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. My son, if you knew what an anxious time this is for us, you would not——

ALEXIS. Now look here. If you're going to start nagging me, I'll cut out the whole thing and refuse to go through with it. I know it was terribly rude of me not to be here this morning, but I had something much more important to do. After all, I've never met any of them and they don't interest me.

QUEEN ELINOR. Don't you realize that the woman you are going to marry this afternoon is here? A woman whose reluctance you are supposed to have overcome? To say nothing of the King and Queen whose hospitality you are supposed to have enjoyed.

ALEXIS. Supposed! Supposed! Supposed! It's

all supposed. I tell you I'm not interested in any of them. How would you like it if you had to marry a woman who had been made love to on your behalf?

VELLENBURG. Well, you could have done it yourself if you'd only had the courage to go. Only you were content for somebody else to go in your name and do all the dirty, dangerous work, and you haven't even the decency to be courteous when the time has come for you to reap the reward.

ALEXIS. Any reaping I do I'd prefer to be the result of my own efforts. And anyway, Vellenburg, what right have you to criticize me?

VELLENBURG. The right of a friend of your mother's, the Queen. The right of a loyal servant of Moldavia.

ALEXIS. Oh, rats!

VELLENBURG. Your Highness never disappoints me!

QUEEN ELINOR. It was very rude of you not to be here this morning, and Count Vellenburg is justly angry with you.

VELLENBURG. Angry is hardly the word, your Majesty.

ALEXIS. I've already told you I had something of a private nature to attend to which was of much more importance to me.

VELLENBURG. Perhaps you'll tell us what this important business was?

ALEXIS. Well, if you want the truth, you can have it. I was saying good-bye to the only woman I can ever care a hang about, Marie Duvigny. (VELLENBURG *about to speak.* ALEXIS *continues)* You may sneer, but that's because you don't understand. You've been a politician so long that you've forgotten how to be a man. You're just a bloodless machine with red-tape arteries.

QUEEN ELINOR. Alexis, please!

ALEXIS. Why should he sneer at the only thing that's ever meant anything to me? *(Hysterically)* I'm not a patriot. There's someone I care for a million times more than you or Moldavia or that wretched Princess that I've never seen. I don't want to marry her. I want to be left alone in peace, to love who I want to love, to go where I please, to do what I like.

VELLENBURG. You know that's impossible. You are Prince Alexis of Moldavia and you have a certain duty.

ALEXIS. And supposing I refused? Supposing I said to hell with duty?

VELLENBURG. *(Very solemnly)* Then Moldavia would disown you. You would be banished forever. Your name, your tit'es would be taken from you. You would be a man without honor, without name or country.

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Trying to pacify* ALEXIS*)* My son, you are over tired and excited. Vellenburg says that Katerina has grown into a beautiful woman. Perhaps when you meet her and know her——

ALEXIS. I tell you, Mother, I don't want to know her.

QUEEN ELINOR. Don't make me ashamed of my only son, Alexis. *(A* MANSERVANT *enters* C. *and announces "the Princess Katerina of Wal'achia." The* PRINCESS *enters. The* QUEEN *goes to her)* Katerina! *(Embraces her.)*

KATERINA. I wanted to talk to you before Father and Mother saw you, so I came straight up.

QUEEN ELINOR. Why, of course, child. You know Count Vellenburg, though I suppose you don't remember him.

KATERINA. Of course I do. I recognized him at once at the station.

VELLENBURG. I shouldn't have known *you*. The

last time I saw you, you were a child, and now you are a very beautiful woman. *(He bows.)*

KATERINA. You embarrass me, Count Vellenburg.

QUEEN ELINOR. Oh, but why? It's true. Alexis has already told us. He has been counting the hours until your arrival, haven't you, Alexis?

(KATERINA *turns to* ALEXIS. *There is a pause. The* QUEEN *and* VELLENBURG *watch her anxiously.* KATERINA *goes to* ALEXIS *with outstretched hand. The* QUEEN *and* VELLENBURG *breathe a sigh of relief.)*

ALEXIS. *(Awkwardly)* I'm very sorry that I wasn't down in time to meet you, but I was—I had——

QUEEN ELINOR. It was really my fault. I insisted on his staying in bed. He had a chill and I thought the cold morning air would be bad for him.

KATERINA. Why, of course—it would have been absurd of him to have taken any risks.

QUEEN ELINOR. Now, my dear, sit down and tell me all about it. First of all, I want you to know how glad I am that you and Alexis are going to be married, and I hope you'll make each other very happy. *(ALL sit.)*

KATERINA. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I'm—I'm—terribly worried.

QUEEN ELINOR. Worried? What about?

KATERINA. This marriage of ours.

QUEEN ELINOR. But what's worrying you about that? Alexis told me that everything was arranged to your mutual satisfaction when he was visiting you.

KATERINA. Yes, it was; but the dreadful part of it all is that since Alexis left I have discovered that I made a mistake.

VELLENBURG. *(Jumping up and very apprehensive)* Mistake!

ALEXIS. *(Enthusiastically)* A mistake! Then everything——

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Interrupting him hurriedly)* One moment, Alexis. *(To* KATERINA*)* What do you mean exactly by mistake?

KATERINA. I have discovered that my feelings for Alexis are not what I thought they were—are not those that a woman should have for a man she is going to marry.

VELLENBURG. Haven't you left it a little late to make this discovery?

KATERINA. Oh, I discovered it immediately Alexis left Wallachia, but what could I do? I couldn't tell Father and Mother—the engagement was already announced, so I thought I'd wait until I arrived here —until I saw you.

QUEEN ELINOR. What do you want me to do? What can I do?

KATERINA. Call this wedding off. Tell my father and mother that you have changed your mind,—that you don't want Alexis to marry me.

VELLENBURG. My child, you must be mad. Don't you realize that that's impossible? All arrangements for the wedding have been made. Everybody is in Baroc for the ceremony this afternoon. The treaty between your country and ours is to be ratified. And you calmly suggest that we call the wedding off!

QUEEN ELINOR. You must have realized how impossible it would be for us to do as you want to now.

ALEXIS. Why did you come at all? Why didn't you stay in Wallachia?

VELLENBURG. Have you no regard for Prince Alexis' feelings?

ALEXIS. Oh, don't bother about those.

QUEEN ELINOR. If you felt this way about things, why did you come?

KATERINA. Because I gave my word to Alexis when he was with me in Wallachia that I would go through with it.

VELLENBURG. Does the word of the Princess Katerina of Wallachia mean nothing?

KATERINA. I came to see if her Majesty and the Prince would release me from that word. If not, I shall keep it to the letter.

ALEXIS. Well, as far as I'm concerned——

VELLENBURG. As far as Moldavia is concerned, it is impossible to release you.

KATERINA. *(Turning to the* QUEEN*)* And your Majesty?

QUEEN ELINOR. My dear, even if I wanted to help you, it would be impossible now.

KATERINA. Then there's nothing more I can do, is there?

ALEXIS. That sounds very cheerful for me.

QUEEN ELINOR. I'm very glad that you are taking a sensible and honorable point of view over this matter. After all, you and Alexis apparently got on well together when you met in Wallachia.

KATERINA. I don't wish to be reminded of anything that happened when Alexis came to Wallachia.

ALEXIS. I absolutely agree. I think the less said about that the better.

QUEEN ELINOR. Well, that rests between you two. And now, Alexis, I think you had better go and change. Luncheon is at one, and we all leave for the Cathedral at two-thirty.

ALEXIS. I think I'll have lunch up in my own rooms. I'm terribly nervy and I shall feel better if I am alone. *(Goes to* KATERINA*)* Good-bye, Katerina. I'm sorry for your sake that you've been so disappointed this morning.

VELLENBURG. Then you will meet me here at two-fifteen. You and I are to go to the Cathedral together.

ALEXIS. So I understand. *(He goes to door* C.*)* Until this afternoon, then. *(Bows and exits.)*

(MANSERVANT *enters* C., *announcing: "His Majesty, the King of Wallachia." Enter* NICHOLAS C. MANSERVANT *exits.)*

KING. *(Going to* QUEEN*)* Ah, my dear Elinor, how are you? *(He kisses her on both cheeks)* I haven't seen you for—let me see. It must be ten years, at least. You haven't altered a bit.

QUEEN ELINOR. That's very nice of you, Nicholas. Where's Elisabeth?

KING. She's gone to powder her nose. That'll take her till lunch time, at least. Hello, Katerina. How did you get up here so quickly? In a hurry to say "How d'you do" to your young man? *(To* VELLENBURG*)* How are you, Vellenburg? *(Shakes hands.)*

KATERINA. I wanted to talk to Queen Elinor.

KING. Where's Alexis? Why isn't he here?

VELLENBURG. Alexis had a bad night.

KING. Well, I suppose any man has a right to feel a bit squeamish on his wedding day. I remember the morning I was married. It took three bottles of champagne, six coachmen and twelve white horses to get *me* to the cathedral!

VELLENBURG. His Majesty has a very subtle sense of humor.

KING. Subtle be blowed!

KATERINA. Father!

KING. It's only in your mother's absence that I can claim the privilege of free speech, and if you want my candid opinion of marriage as an institution——

KATERINA. We don't, Father.

KING. I think it is one of the most barbarous conventions of modern civilization——

(Enter MANSERVANT C. *with tray of cocktails.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. Cocktails—thank heavens.

KING. Ah! That's the first kind word I've heard since I've been in Moldavia. (MANSERVANT *hands round the cocktails.)* It was a very dusty journey and a dry train. My wife's latest form of torture is that I shall not drink in public as an example to the people. *(He makes a grimace and takes a cocktail.)*

KATERINA. Father, wouldn't you rather wait until after the ceremony?

KING. I don't see the slightest need for any postponement. *(Drains his glass.)*

VELLENBURG. As one who in a small way has helped to bring about this wedding, may I, in the name of all loyal Moldavians, wish you every happiness?

KATERINA. Thank you, Count Vellenburg.

KING. *(Turns to* MANSERVANT, *puts empty glass on tray and takes second drink)* As your father and as one who has labored so unscrupulously on your behalf, I won't wish you the greatest possible happiness, because perhaps that's too much for anyone to hope for, but I wish you the next best thing—that enviable state that for twenty-five years *I* have striven for but never achieved—resignation! *(Drinks.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Frigidly)* I'm sure Elizabeth would be interested to hear you talking like this. What a pity she isn't here.

KING. Not at all, not at all. As a matter of fact, she rather cramps my style.

QUEEN ELINOR. Nicholas. I'm sure there must be several things you would like to discuss in private with Count Vellenburg. We *will* excuse you if you want to go.

KING. That's very thoughtful of you, Elinor. Those two cocktails have given me quite a thirst,

so—*(Turning to* VELLENBURG*)*—if there *is* any little thing you wish to put before me——

VELLENBURG. Perhaps your Majesty would care to come up to my study. There is a certain clause—

KING. Exactly. So if you will excuse us, Elinor—

QUEEN ELINOR. I quite understand. Don't forget lunch at one.

KING. *(Goes to* KATERINA; *kisses her)* Goodbye for the present, my child. Bear up! *(Taking* VELLENBURG *by the arm and walking to* C. *door)* Now in the event of an attack by hostile troops on your northern frontier, we are prepared—we are prepared to immediately dispatch—— *(They exit* C., *and the* MANSERVANT *also, shutting the door after them.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. Fate played a shabby trick on your father when she made him a king.

KATERINA. And on me, too. I envy even my own maids. They at least have some say in their own destinies—can go where they please—love as they please——

QUEEN ELINOR. My dear, when you are as old as I am you will find that the only thing that matters is one's own peace of mind.

KATERINA. And do you think that I can ever have any peace of mind again—not knowing even where—Oh, it's too terrible! *(She cries.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. What is it, my dear? Can't I help you?

KATERINA. No, nobody can help me. I can't even tell anybody.

(MANSERVANT *enters* C. *with a letter. He hands it to the* QUEEN.)

MANSERVANT. The Warden of the Palace Prison commanded me to deliver this letter to your Majesty and await your reply.

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Takes the letter, opens and reads it)* Have the writer told that the Queen is sorry—but it is not in her power to grant his request. (MANSERVANT *exits* C. QUEEN *re-reads letter. Quietly)* And we worry about our own petty troubles.

KATERINA. Why do you say that?

QUEEN ELINOR. This letter is from a political prisoner—*(She is watching* KATERINA *closely as she speaks)*—whose only crime was that he served Moldavia too well. He says—— *(She reads)* "If it is impossible for a man in my position to ever be happy again, you have it in your power to at least give me a temporary *illusion* of happiness. You can, by granting me my request, enable me to bear my imprisonment and the certainty of my fate with more resignation and less resentment." *(The* QUEEN *pauses and looks at* KATERINA.*)*

KATERINA. *(Endeavoring to suppress her agitation and excitement)* Well—what does he ask? What does he want?

QUEEN ELINOR. He asks for one glimpse of the Princess Katerina before she goes to the Cathedral to be married.

KATERINA. *(Almost in a whisper)* And you refused him.

QUEEN. I had no alternative.

KATERINA. *(Hysterically)* But you must! You must!! How can you be so inhuman!!

QUEEN ELINOR. You're a brave woman, Katerina.

KATERINA. What do you mean?

QUEEN ELINOR You *know* who this letter is from. You knew when Peter Kraditsch left Wallachia that he was not the Prince of Moldavia. Why did you do it? Why did you agree to come here and marry Alexis?

KATERINA. I knew that, if I didn't, he would never have left Wallachia alive. I know that now, at the last moment, if I refuse to marry Alexis, I shall be signing his death warrant. How did you find out that I knew?

QUEEN ELINOR. I knew as soon as I saw you meet Alexis. It is very brave of you to go through with it.

KATERINA. No, it isn't. It's cowardice. I'm only terrified as to what will happen to him. What are you going to do with him?

QUEEN. At the moment his fate is undecided. At the best he will be sent abroad, to remain there indefinitely. At the worst——

KATERINA. *(In a deadly quiet voice)* I am marrying Alexis only to save the life of the man I care about better than anything else on earth. If, after I am married, any harm comes to him, I shall let the whole world know of the trick played by Moldavia to obtain the signature of my father to a paltry treaty.

QUEEN ELINOR. You may rest assured that I shall do my utmost to see that no harm comes to him.

KATERINA. Where is he now? Couldn't I see him just once? Just for a little while?

QUEEN. My dear, will that help you or him to bear things any easier? He will probably be sent abroad tomorrow. I'll see him and tell him that you are thinking of him and give him a message from you——

KATERINA. Will you tell him that I hate this marriage—that the thought of any other man's arms around me is terrible,—tell him that life will lose all its interest for me now! *(*MANSERVANT *enters* C. *and says, "Luncheon is served." Whispering to* QUEEN*)* No,—just tell him I love him.

(The QUEEN *starts up to the door, stops, turns, holds out her hand to* KATERINA, *who joins her, and they exit* C. *as curtain falls for a few seconds to denote the passing of two hours.)*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE II: *Same as Scene I.*

TIME: *Two hours later.*

DISCOVERED: *When the Curtain rises,* VELLENBURG *is seated at table* L. *signing letters.* MANSERVANT *enters* C.

MANSERVANT. Shall I bring him in, your Excellency?

VELLENBURG. Yes. (MANSERVANT *exits, and reenters, bringing in* PETER KRADITSCH. PETER *is wearing a long semi-military overcoat, and a muffler around his neck. To* SERVANT) All right. You may leave us. *(Exit* MANSERVANT.) Sit down, Kraditsch.

PETER. Thanks. I'd rather stand.

VELLENBURG. I suppose you're wondering why I sent for you.

PETER. No. I'm past wondering about any of your motives, Count Vellenburg.

VELLENBURG. Her Majesty has handed me your letter and asked me to see you.

PETER. Well?

VELLENBURG. Much against my advice, she seems inclined to grant your request.

PETER. It wasn't very much to ask, was it?

VELLENBURG. Her Majesty requested me to take you to the Round Room in the Western Tower, which overlooks the courtyard. There you will have a perfect view of the bridal procession—for all the

good it will do you. You will be locked in there until I return from the ceremony, when I shall come for you and escort you back to your—your quarters.

PETER. My prison, you mean. (VELLENBURG *shrugs his shoulders.)* Will you please convey my grateful thanks to her Majesty?

VELLENBURG. I'm afraid you're getting rather bitter, Kraditsch.

PETER. Bitter! *(He laughs)* What do you expect me to do, fall down and worship you for keeping me alive?

VELLENBURG. We might not even have done that.

PETER. *(Satirically)* My humble thanks to my grateful country. After risking my unworthy skin in her service; after saving her from being plunged into a war which would have put her out of existence; after saving her puling Prince from doing his own wooing and probably perishing in the attempt—I am told that I should be grateful that I am not exterminated as a reward! God save me from my country!

VELLENBURG. There I think I am inclined to agree with you.

PETER. Oh, forget that you are a politician and be a man for once. What are you talking about?

VELLENBURG. Were the circumstances not so—so singular, I should demand a little more respect.

PETER. When a man cares as little as I do what happens to him, he ceases to consider the finer amenities—he becomes merely natural.

VELLENBURG. So you don't care what happens to you?

PETER. After today—no.

VELLENBURG. That is just as well. When you said just now "God save me from my country," you inadvertently hit upon our solution of the problem of your disposal. Incidently I, not God, will save you from it.

PETER. God should be pleased at having so efficient an understudy.

VELLENBURG. As long as you remain in Moldavia you are a menace—a great menace. That being the case, it is essential for us that you should leave the country.

PETER. In plain language, I am to be banished.

VELLENBURG. Why use such an insidious word? You will be sent abroad, provided with a pension, on condition that you never again try to come back to Moldavia. If you should be indiscreet enough at any time to attempt to re-enter the country—— *(Pauses eloquently.)*

PETER. Go on. Don't mind me.

VELLENBURG. Surely it is unnecessary for me to go into further details. There will be no restrictions as to where you will go. You may choose your country. Could anything be fairer?

PETER. And to think that there was a time when I was proud to be a Moldavian. Do you think that, once I leave here, anything on God's earth would induce me to come back?

VELLENBURG. Then I take it you agree?

PETER. When do I leave?

VELLENBURG. Tonight, or, at the latest, tomorrow morning.

PETER. After the marriage is over, the sooner I leave the better I shall be pleased.

VELLENBURG. I am glad to find you so amenable. And now if you don't mind, I will escort you to the Round Room. The time's getting short and I shall soon be leaving for the Cathedral. By the way, you will keep your muffler well wrapped around your face. If the Princess *should* look up and see you at the window, she might get rather a shock. *(QUEEN'S voice is heard off crying "Vellenburg, Vellenburg!" She enters* C., *terribly agitated and excited. Going to her)* Your Majesty!

QUEEN ELINOR. Count Vellenburg, something terrible has happened!

VELLENBURG. Your Majesty! What is it?

QUEEN ELINOR. He's gone!

VELLENBURG. Gone!

QUEEN ELINOR. Yes, gone! Gone! ! He's gone! Don't you understand?

VELLENBURG. Would your Majesty mind telling me what you are talking about?

QUEEN ELINOR. Alexis, you fool! Oh, I'm sorry, Count, but I don't know what I'm saying. It's all so dreadful. I went to his rooms just now. He and his servant had disappeared and I found this letter lying on the table. *(She hands him letter.)*

PETER. Perhaps your Majesty would prefer to be alone with Count Vellenburg?

VELLENBURG. *(Reading letter)* "Dear Mother: By the time you read this letter I shall be on my way to Triest, en route for America. I cannot go through with this cold-blooded ceremony, so I am voluntarily accepting my sentence of permanent exile. May I suggest that Peter Kraditsch resume the part of Alexis which he played so well in Wallachia. As far as I am concerned, he is welcome to Katerina, my title, my birthright, my country and anything that was mine. I shall never return to claim them—"

QUEEN ELINOR. What are we going to do? In ten minutes he was to have left here for the cathedral.

VELLENBURG. *(Still looking at the letter)* "He will probably uphold them better than I ever could." For once in his life Alexis was right.

QUEEN ELINOR. What do you mean?

VELLENBURG. He has suggested to us the obvious means, the only means of saving the situation.

QUEEN ELINOR. Do you seriously suggest that this man should take Alexis' place and marry Katerina?

VELLENBURG. If he is willing to do so after the way we have treated him.

QUEEN ELINOR. You must be mad, Vellenburg. Do you realize what it means—that I shall acknowledge him as my son?

VELLENBURG. And you will have made a good bargain.

QUEEN ELINOR. It means that he will one day be the King of Moldavia.

VELLENBURG. If this marriage does not take place today, there will be no Moldavia in a few months' time. Your Majesty, you must consent.

QUEEN ELINOR. Oh, I can't think. I must have time.

VELLENBURG. This thing must be decided now! *(He turns to* PETER*)* You have heard everything. Are you willing to help your country, perhaps to save it, by becoming its Prince and marrying the Princess Katerina?

PETER. Is it your Majesty's wish that I should do this?

VELLENBURG. I speak for her Majesty.

PETER. And I speak for myself. I want to know that, if I marry Katerina, I shall not have to give her up again.

QUEEN ELINOR. If you marry Katerina today, nobody will know that you are not my son.

PETER. Then it is your Majesty's wish?

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Pause)* Yes.

VELLENBURG. *(Quickly)* Good. There isn't a moment to lose. You must come with me at once to Alexis' apartment and change into his clothes for the ceremony. Your Majesty, we three will meet again in conference after the wedding. Come, Prince Alexis.

PETER. *(Bowing to the* QUEEN*)* Your Majesty! (VELLENBURG *and* PETER *exit* C.*)*

(The QUEEN *looks at* ALEXIS' *letter again, then slowly tears it up. Enter* KING *and* QUEEN OF WALLACHIA C., *all dressed up for the wedding.)*

KING. Ah! There you are, Elinor.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Alexis not down yet? I do think he might have made an effort to see his future mother-in-law before this.

QUEEN ELINOR. He will be here at any moment now.

KING. What's the matter with you, my dear? You seem very depressed?

QUEEN ELINOR. When one is losing one's only son, one cannot be expected to be particularly cheerful.

KING. I can quite understand your feelings. I feel the same way about Katerina.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. What about my feelings?

KING. You don't understand, my dear. In the interests of diplomatic relationships, we have to stifle——

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Stifle—fiddlesticks! You know perfectly well that you'll be jolly glad to get Katerina off your hands.

KING. You must pardon Elizabeth, Elinor. Her finer feelings have become somewhat blunted.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Living with you for twenty-five years would blunt the feelings of an elephant.

KING. Now, my dear, this is no time to indulge in your favorite pastime. Let us be cheerful. Let us be friendly today. *(He kisses her on the cheek)* At all costs. *(Turns to* ELINOR*)* How do you like this uniform, Elinor?

QUEEN ELINOR. I think it admirable.

KING. I rather favored The Death's Head Hussars, but Elizabeth insisted on The Heavy Artillery. However, this isn't so bad, is it?

QUEEN ELINOR. Very nice.

KING. Snappy without being startling.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I do wish you——

QUEEN ELINOR. Do you know if Katerina is ready?

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I told her to come in here for us.

KING. What was the matter with her at luncheon? She didn't eat a thing and she looked as though she would burst into tears at any moment.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. Every woman has a perfect right to cry on her wedding day. They'll both be all right when the wedding's over and they are alone together.

(KATERINA *enters* C. *in her bridal gown.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Going to her)* My dear, you look perfectly lovely.

KING. A credit to your old father, an absolute credit. By the way, my dear, I've arranged for a couple of cinematograph photographers to take a few shots of us before we enter the Cathedral. Very good loyalist propaganda. "Underneath the skin of a king beats the heart of a proud father." You know the kind of stuff.

KATERINA. I don't want any pictures taken. I'm quite nervous and harassed enough as it is. Besides, I want nothing that will remind me of today. Where is Alexis?

QUEEN ELINOR. I'm expecting him down here at any moment with Vellenburg. Why?

KATERINA. I would like to talk to him alone for a few moments before we go to the Cathedral.

KING. You'll have plenty of time to talk to him alone after you're married.

KATERINA. Why will you persist in interfering, Father? It is vitally important to me that I should

see Alexis alone for a few minutes. Surely it's not a terrible lot to ask.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. I'll take Nicholas downstairs, Elinor. Perhaps you'll tell Alexis that Katerina wishes to speak to him, and then join us.

QUEEN ELINOR. If Katerina approves of that.

KATERINA. If you would be so kind.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. *(Goes to* KATERINA*)* You won't have much time, my dear. The coaches will be here for us in a few minutes. Cheer up. It will soon be over. *(Kisses her.)*

KATERINA. I'm all right, Mother.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. *(Goes to door* C.*)* Come along, Nicholas! *(Exit.)*

KING. And for goodness' sake don't cry and get your eyes all messed up. Don't forget you're driving to the Cathedral with me, and I want those pictures to be good. *(Exit* KING C.*)*

QUEEN ELINOR. *(Starting to door* C.*)* I'll send Alexis to you.

KATERINA. Wait a moment. Don't go. Did you see him? Did you give him my message?

QUEEN ELINOR. Did I see him?

KATERINA. Alexis. I mean my Alexis—Peter Kraditsch.

QUEEN ELINOR. Yes, I saw him.

KATERINA. Well, what did he say?

QUEEN ELINOR. He asked to see you again before your marriage—before he went away.

KATERINA. Then you *are* sending him away?

QUEEN ELINOR. That was Vellenburg's first idea, yes. But afterwards we decided that it would be better not to send him.

KATERINA. Then what are you going to do with him?

QUEEN ELINOR. I'd rather somebody else told you.

KATERINA. *(Almost hysterically)* I warned you

that if anything happened to him I'd swear to tell my father everything, and by God, I will. Why do you think I'm marrying your precious son? Do you think I want to? (KATERINA *goes to window. She has her back to the door.)*

(PETER *enters* C. *in the full dress uniform of an officer of the Moldavian Guard.* KATERINA *does not turn around.)*

QUEEN ELINOR. Alexis, Katerina is very distressed. Perhaps you can help her. *(Exits* C.*)*

PETER. *(Gruffly)* Well!

KATERINA. *(Without turning around)* No, you can't help me. It's too late now. We'll both have to go through with it. I'm sorry for you, too. (PETER *doesn't answer.* KATERINA *turns to him, but by this time he has his back to her and is gazing at* L. *window. She walks toward him)* Before we go out of here to be married, I think it only fair to tell you that I haven't the slightest feeling for you. I never shall have even if we both live to be a hundred.

PETER. *(Without turning)* Really!

KATERINA. Is that all you have to say, "Really"? Aren't you man enough to resent that? Have you no pride? Why haven't you the courage to turn around and refuse to marry me? Have you no will of your own? *(She pauses.* PETER *doesn't answer.)* No! Apparently you haven't. What a man! *(Another pause.)* I believe it's usual for a girl to confess any past which she might have had to the man she is going to marry. I'm not going to do that because you don't interest me sufficiently. I'd like you to know before I marry you that I'm in love with another man—a real man—not a decadent Prince——

PETER. *(Still with his back to her)* Go on! Go on!

KATERINA. I want you to know that any affection I may be forced to submit to from you will only be made bearable if I think of him—of his embraces, of his love for me. And if you are content after I've told you all this to marry a woman who loves somebody else better than anything in the world——

PETER. *(Turns to her)* Do you mind saying that again?

KATERINA. Yes, I'll say it a million—— *(She stops suddenly, looks at him for a second, then scarcely believing her eyes, she almost whispers)* Peter! *(Then louder)* Peter!!

PETER. *(Takes her in his arms)* Katerina!

KATERINA. But—why are you here, like this? The Prince—Alexis—where is he?

MANSERVANT. *(Enters* C.*)* Your Highness, Count Vellenburg begs to know if he may have a word with you?

PETER. Tell him I'll be with him in a couple of minutes.

MANSERVANT. Yes, your Highness. *(Exits* C.*)*

KATERINA. Your Highness! You! Then you were the real Alexis all the time.

PETER. Oh, no! I have only been the real Alexis for a quarter of an hour.

KATERINA. I don't understand.

PETER. I'll explain everything to you tonight or tomorrow or the next day or next year, but not now. We haven't time. Kiss me. *(They embrace.)* Again. *(They kiss again.)*

VELLENBURG. *(Enters* C.*)* Pardon, your Highness, but the cortege is waiting to leave the Palace.

PETER. Did you knock when you came in?

VELLENBURG. I did, your Highness.

PETER. Then go outside and knock again—louder. (VELLENBURG, *nonplussed, goes to the door.)* Oh—and Vellenburg—— (VELLENBURG *turns.)* You might wait until I say come in, will you? (VELLEN-

BURG *exits* C. PETER *holds out his arms.* KATERINA *goes to him.)* We must go now, my sweet.

KATERINA. Just tell me one thing first.

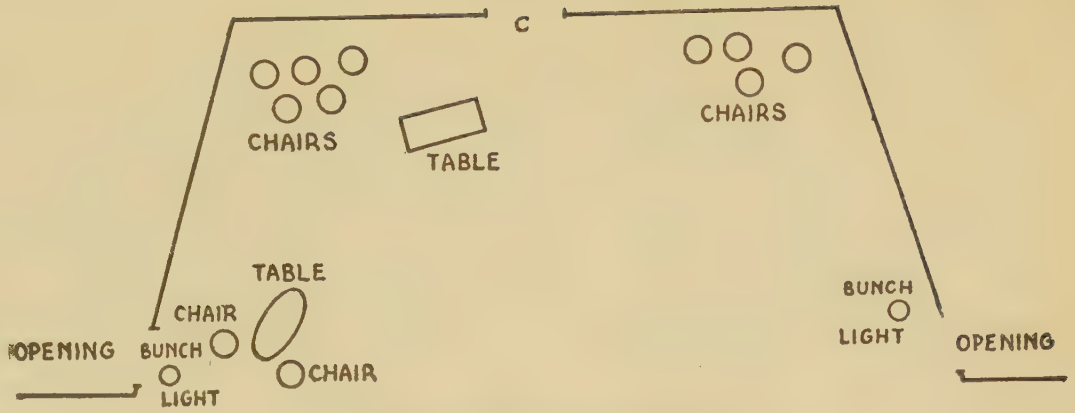
PETER. Anything—anything.

KATERINA. They're not making you take his place just for the ceremony?

PETER. No, darling. I'm taking his place tonight —tomorrow—and forever! !

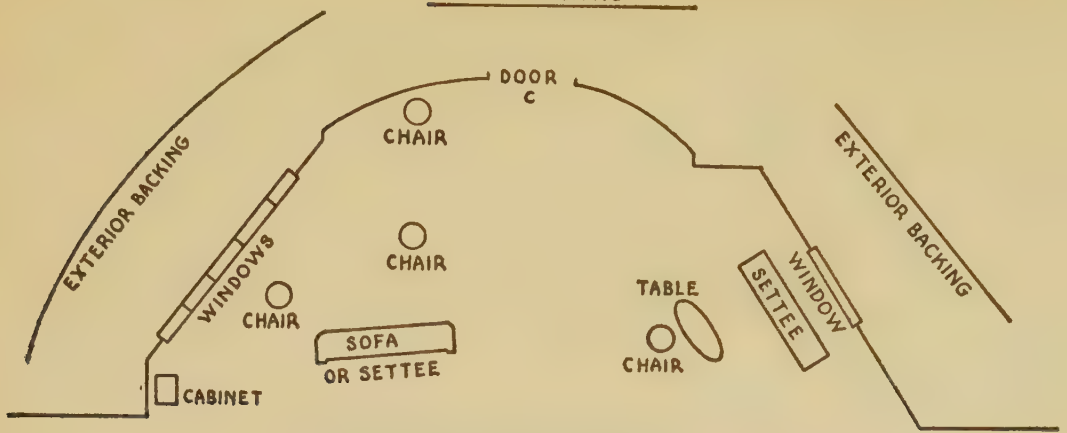
CURTAIN

"The Command Performance *Act III, See Page 94*



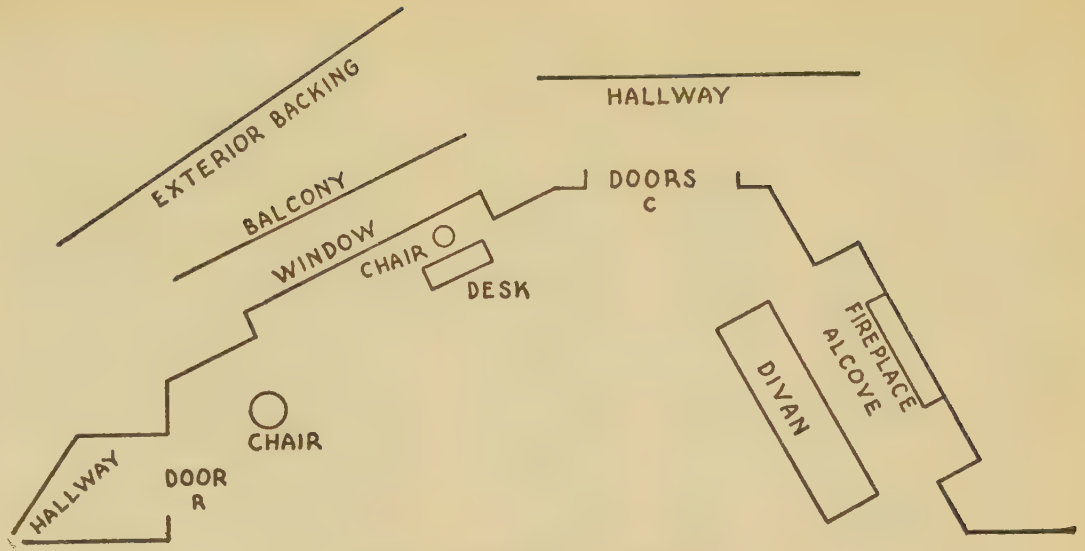
SCENE DESIGN ACT I SCENE I

"THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE"



SCENE DESIGN ACT 1 SCENE 2 - ACT 3 SCENES 1 & 2

"THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE"



SCENE DESIGN ACT 2 SCENES 1 & 2

"THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE"

KICK IN

Play in 4 acts. By Willard Mack. **7 males, 5 females. 2 interiors.** Modern costumes. Plays 2½ hours.

"Kick In" is the latest of the very few available mystery plays. Like "Within the Law," "Seven Keys to Baldpate," "The Thirteenth Chair," and "In the Next Room," it is one of those thrillers which are accurately described as "not having a dull moment in it from beginning to end." It is a play with all the ingredients of popularity, not at all difficult to set or to act; the plot carries it along, and the situations are built with that skill and knowledge of the theatre for which Willard Mack is known. An ideal mystery melodrama, for high schools and colleges. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

TILLY OF BLOOMSBURY

("Happy-Go-Lucky.") A comedy in 3 acts. By Ian Hay. 9 males, 7 females. 2 interior scenes. Modern dress. Plays a full evening.

Into an aristocratic family comes Tilly, lovable and youthful, with ideas and manners which greatly upset the circle. Tilly is so frankly honest that she makes no secret of her tremendous affection for the young son of the family; this brings her into many difficulties. But her troubles have a joyous end in charmingly blended scenes of sentiment and humor. This comedy presents an opportunity for fine acting, handsome stage settings, and beautiful costuming. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.)
Price, 75 Cents.

BILLY

Farce-comedy in 3 acts. By George Cameron. **10 males, 5 females.** (A few minor male parts can be doubled, making the cast 7 males, 5 females.) 1 exterior. Costumes, modern. Plays 2¼ hours.

The action of the play takes place on the S. S. "Florida," bound for Havana. The story has to do with the disappearance of a set of false teeth, which creates endless complications among passengers and crew, and furnishes two and a quarter hours of the heartiest laughter. One of the funniest comedies produced in the last dozen years on the American stage is "Billy" (sometimes called "Billy's Tombstones"), in which the late Sidney Drew achieved a hit in New York and later toured the country several times. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

POLLYANNA

"The glad play," in 3 acts. By Catherine Chisholm Cushing. Based on the novel by Eleanor H. Porter. 5 males, 6 females. 2 interiors. Costumes, modern. Plays 2¼ hours.

The story has to do with the experiences of an orphan girl who is thrust, unwelcome, into the home of a maiden aunt. In spite of the tribulations that beset her life she manages to find something to be glad about, and brings light into sunless lives. Finally, Pollyanna straightens out the love affairs of her elders, and last, but not least, finds happiness for herself in the heart of Jimmy. "Pollyanna" is a glad play and one which is bound to give one a better appreciation of people and the world. It reflects the humor, tenderness and humanity that gave the story such wonderful popularity among young and old.

Produced at the Hudson Theatre, New York, and for two seasons on tour, by George C. Tyler, with Helen Hayes in the part of "Pollyanna." (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

THE CHARM SCHOOL

A comedy in 3 acts. By Alice Duer Miller and Robert Milton. 6 males, 10 females (may be played by 5 males and 8 females). Any number of school girls may be used in the ensembles. Scenes, 2 interiors. Modern costumes. Plays 2½ hours.

The story of "The Charm School" is familiar to Mrs. Miller's readers. It relates the adventures of a handsome young automobile salesman, scarcely out of his 'teens, who, upon inheriting a girls' boarding-school from a maiden aunt, insists on running it himself, according to his own ideas, chief of which is, by the way, that the dominant feature in the education of the young girls of to-day should be CHARM. The situations that arise are teeming with humor—clean, wholesome humor. In the end the young man gives up the school, and promises to wait until the most precocious of his pupils reaches a marriageable age. The play has the freshness of youth, the inspiration of an extravagant but novel idea, the charm of originality, and the promise of wholesome, sanely amusing, pleasant entertainment. We strongly recommend it for high school production. It was first produced at the Bijou Theatre, New York, then toured the country. Two companies are now playing it in England. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

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NOT SO LONG AGO

Comedy in a Prologue, 3 acts, and Epilogue. By Arthur Richman. 5 males, 7 females. 2 interiors, 1 exterior. Costumes, 1876. Plays a full evening.

Arthur Richman has constructed his play around the Cinderella legend. The playwright has shown great wisdom in his choice of material, for he has cleverly crossed the Cinderella theme with a strain of Romeo and Juliet. Mr. Richman places his young lovers in the picturesque New York of forty years ago. This time Cinderella is a seamstress in the home of a social climber, who may have been the first of her kind, though we doubt it. She is interested sentimentally in the son of this house. Her father, learning of her infatuation for the young man without learning also that it is imaginary on the young girl's part, starts out to discover his intentions. He is a poor inventor. The mother of the youth, ambitious chiefly for her children, shudders at the thought of marriage for her son with a sewing-girl. But the Prince contrives to put he slipper on the right foot, and the end is happiness. The play s quaint and agreeable and the three acts are rich in the charm of love and youth. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

THE LOTTERY MAN

Comedy in 3 acts, by Rida Johnson Young. 4 males, 5 females. 3 easy interiors. Costumes, modern. Plays 2¼ hours.

In "The Lottery Man" Rida Johnson Young has seized upon a custom of some newspapers to increase their circulation by clever schemes. Mrs. Young has made the central figure in her famous comedy a newspaper reporter, Jack Wright. Wright owes his employer money, and he agrees to turn in one of the most sensational scoops the paper has ever known. His idea is to conduct a lottery, with *himself* as the prize. The lottery is announced. Thousands of old maids buy coupons. Meantime Wright falls in love with a charming girl. Naturally he fears that he may be won by someone else and starts to get as many tickets as his limited means will permit. Finally the last day is announced. The winning number is 1323, and is held by Lizzie, an old maid, in the household of the newspaper owner. Lizzie refuses to give up. It is discovered, however, that she has stolen the ticket. With this clue, the reporter threatens her with arrest. Of course the coupon is surrendered and Wright gets the girl of his choice. Produced at the Bijou Theater, New York, with great success. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

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ARE YOU A MASON?

Farce in 3 acts. By Leo Ditrichstein. 7 males, 7 females. Modern costumes. Plays 2¼ hours. 1 interior.

"Are You a Mason?" is one of those delightful farces like "Charley's Aunt" that are always fresh. "A mother and a daughter," says the critic of the New York *Herald*, "had husbands who account for absences from the joint household on frequent evenings, falsely pretending to be Masons. The men do not know each other's duplicity, and each tells his wife of having advanced to leadership in his lodge. The older woman was so well pleased with her husband's supposed distinction in the order that she made him promise to put up the name of a visiting friend for membership. Further perplexity over the principal liar arose when a suitor for his second daughter's hand proved to be a real Mason. . . . To tell the story of the play would require volumes, its complications are so numerous. It is a house of cards. One card wrongly placed and the whole thing would collapse. But it stands, an example of remarkable ingenuity. You wonder at the end of the first act how the fun can be kept up on such a slender foundation. But it continues and grows to the last curtain." One of the most hilariously amusing farces ever written, especially suited to schools and Masonic Lodges. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) **Price, 75 Cents.**

KEMPY

A delightful comedy in 3 acts. By J. C. Nugent and Elliott Nugent. 4 males, 4 females. 1 interior throughout. Costumes, modern. Plays 2½ hours.

No wonder "Kempy" has been such a tremendous hit in New York, Chicago—wherever it has played. It snaps with wit and humor of the most delightful kind. It's electric. It's small-town folk perfectly pictured. Full of types of varied sorts, each one done to a turn and served with zestful sauce. An ideal entertainment for amusement purposes. The story is about a high-falutin' daughter who in a fit of pique marries the young plumber-architect, who comes to fix the water pipes, just because he "understands" her, having read her book and having sworn to marry the authoress. But in that story lies all the humor that kept the audience laughing every second of every act. Of course there are lots of ramifications, each of which bears its own brand of laughter-making potentials. But the plot and the story are not the main things. There is, for instance, the work of the company. The fun growing out of this family mixup is lively and clean. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) **Price, 75 Cents.**

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